University of Alberta

Enhancing Educational Opportunity in an Elementary School: A Principal's Perspective

by

Usha Procinsky

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Elementary Education

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Enhancing Educational Opportunity in an Elementary School: A Principal's Perspective** submitted by Usha Procinsky in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Dedication

…for my mother Radha Thomas and
the other women of Madumal House

Abstract

This interpretive study explored the perspectives and actions of one elementary school principal in an urban elementary school and how those actions related to enhancing educational opportunities for all students in the school. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews; direct observation; reflective conversations; informal interviews with students, staff, parents, and community members; and document analysis.

The study focused on the choices that the principal made about actions to be taken to lead the school toward meeting the goal of enhanced educational opportunities for all students. It further illustrated the complexity of the leadership required for the pursuit of fairness in education.

The major findings of the study relate to the beliefs, practices, relationships and programs. The principal's beliefs about learning and schooling focused on success for each student through the setting of high expectations and the creation of a warm, caring, and supportive environment for learning. Modeling, shared responsibility and accountability, flexibility, openness and the use of humor were prevalent practices in the school, and each individual and his or her contributions to the success of members of the school family were acknowledged and celebrated. People and the building of relationships were also considered to be extremely important with students, parents, staff members, and community members being provided with many opportunities to participate in a collaborative effort on behalf of each student's academic, social, and personal development. Further, the passion and commitment of the school principal to ensuring success for each student were found to be critical in the pursuit of fairness in the school.

Reflections on the actions of the principal began with an analysis of the characteristics of the principal that have enabled her to provide effective leadership to her school. The concepts of "unity in diversity" and "fairness" emerged as important concepts for the enhancement of educational opportunity for all students in the school, as

well as for the principal's leadership. She attained unity in diversity through the involvement of students, staff, parents and community members, and her fairness was extended not only to the students but also to all the other members of the school family. Her entrepreneurial actions allowed her to acquire significant amounts of fiscal and human resources, from community organizations and individuals, for the school.

While the principal in this study exemplifies effective leadership for the enhancement of educational opportunity for all students in a school, further research is necessary to determine the implications of this form of leadership for broader systemic issues.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

How does an elementary school principal enhance educational opportunities for all students? How does the principal address the diversity among the student population? How does the principal choose the activities in which to engage? And what are the dilemmas faced by the principal? I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to explore the actions and reflections of one elementary school principal in an attempt to understand that principal and how she created the conditions for full educational opportunities in her school. In this study I have gathered the ingredients that I believe have enabled one elementary school to provide fair learning opportunities for students.

Introduction

My principal colleagues and I continue to question the extent to which our system of education is reflective of the principles of 'fairness' in education, at both the provincial and the school district level. Many of them speak about the dilemmas that they face in their work to ensure fairness, and they express great frustration in relation to their ability to deal with the dilemmas.

Over the past 20 years, as part of the reform agenda, schools in Alberta have moved to school-based budgeting and school-based decision-making. An underlying principle of school-based decision-making is that fiscal resources are allocated and the concurrent decision-making is delegated to those who are closest to the students for whom decisions are being made. Through this process each school receives a budget allocation based on a per-pupil basis, with additional dollars for special-needs students and high-needs schools. High-needs schools are defined by the socioeconomic status of the families; the lower the socioeconomic status, the higher the need. The students' learning needs such as English as a second language, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities define special-needs children. School staffs are then charged with the

responsibility of developing and implementing quality programming for all the students in their school.

In my discussions with principals, I have found that many principals have expressed concerns about their school's ability to provide the best possible programming to meet the needs of all their students. Issues such as programming for a wide range of special-needs students—from the medically fragile to the gifted—place huge stresses on the life of the school and all the members of the school community. Furthermore, the allocation of fiscal resources based on a per-pupil allocation fails to recognize that some schools, due to the very nature of the student population, their size, or the ability of the community to support the school, are disadvantaged by fiscal equity formulae (Coons, Clune, & Sugarman, 1970; Mitchell, 2000). The assumption that equity in the allocation of fiscal resources produces fairness in educational opportunity is problematic but is one that underlies provincial government education policies in Alberta and some other provinces.

The literature on the topic has suggested that providing full opportunities in education is much more than equity of funding (Coons et al., 1970; Griffiths & Davies, 1995; Gordon, 1999; Grossman, 1998; Kozol, 1991). It is a way of life in schools, a way of life that recognizes the uniqueness of each individual and facilitates the provision of appropriate programming to meet the needs of each one. It is also a way of life that requires a sense of community wherein the development of positive relationships between people is just as important as addressing the needs of individuals.

Public education is central to the promise of democracy (Dewey, 1966). To ensure a citizenry capable of democratic decision making, schools must cultivate in all students the knowledge, skills, and understanding that both arm them with a keen intelligence capable of free thought and lead them to embrace the values under-girding our pluralistic democracy. In other words, schools must enable all students to live productively together. Public education is central to the promise of democracy in another way as well. It should

provide a vehicle for all citizens, regardless of wealth or circumstances of birth, to aspire to the rights and benefits of a society and to create a community with shared purpose (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Unfortunately, the bureaucratic school created at the turn of the 20th century and still predominant today was not designed to meet the needs for social, personal, and intellectual development (Giroux & Greene, 1995). The schools' mission was not to educate all students well, but to process a great many efficiently (Gordon, 1999). Uniform approaches to learning, top-down prescriptions for teaching practice, mandated curriculum, standardized tests that focus on a narrow band of knowledge and skills, and continuing under-investment in teacher knowledge continue to characterize pedagogy in our schools. This, coupled with bureaucratic structures that are designed to batch-process masses of students, works to maintain inequalities in access to knowledge and fails to prepare all young people for full participation in a democratic society (Lewis, 1999; Macedo, 1999).

As we begin the 21st century, public education faces critical times. Most nations are seeking to transform public education systems to make them more responsive to the changing economic, demographic, political, and social climate. In Canada, as elsewhere in the world, efforts to transform schooling have been stimulated by the need to prepare a much more diverse group of future citizens and workers to manage complexity, find and use resources and technologies, and work cooperatively and collaboratively to frame and solve problems.

It is critical that we look beyond the allocation of fiscal resources to examine what it is that schools do for each student. Further, we need to question whether what we offer to our students gives each one of them an equal chance to be equally successful in later life. Maynes (1990) researched the effects of poverty on the education of children in Alberta and found that there was much that was needed to address the concerns from a policy perspective. He found that the further away from the school that one went in the

educational hierarchy, the less understanding one had of the impact of poverty on education From my experiences in one urban school district, discussions amongst educators continue to reflect a sense of urgency for action to make the system of education in our school district 'fairer' for all students. School principals are charged with the responsibility for making changes at the school level and are critical players in any school reform process. Their understanding and commitment is critical to ensuring fairness for all learners.

The literature is replete with studies on the role of the principal (Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1985; Checkley, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Sergiovanni, 1990). The principal as change agent, the principal as effective school leader, the principal as visionary leader, and the principal as instructional leader are some of the roles described in the literature (Conley, 1996; Davis, 1995; Fullan, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Leithwood & Janzi, 1990; Poplin, 1992; Sagor, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994; Starratt, 1995). The literature lacked any significant reference to the role of the principal from the perspective of ensuring fairness in educational opportunity in the schools. It is my belief that hearing the principals' voices is the critical first step in the process of ensuring enhanced educational opportunities and achieving true democracy in our schools.

Coming to the Question

My interest and passion for addressing enhanced opportunities in education comes from my immigrant experience and from my very varied experiences in the field of public education. Over the past 30 years I have worked as a teacher, English as a second language consultant, curriculum supervisor, associate superintendent of schools, and school principal in a large urban school district in Alberta. The school district has 208 schools serving about 78,000 students from a wide array of backgrounds relative to their language, culture, religion, and socioeconomic standing.

In all of the positions that I have held in the district, I have had to deal with issues of fairness. For eight years as a classroom teacher, I dealt with the challenges of providing programming to meet the needs of a culturally, socially, and economically diverse group of students. I faced many challenges and dealt with many dilemmas in attempting to provide programming to meet their individual needs.

In 1980, as the English as a second language consultant for the district, I was responsible for providing the leadership in developing and implementing programs for the large number of immigrant students who were entering our schools. Through my association with schools, I experienced the challenges and the dilemmas that school staffs faced in providing programming to meet the diverse needs of the students in their schools. I was struck with the variances amongst the schools in terms of their provision of full opportunities in education, which were clearly played out in the different approaches to meeting the needs of the students in their schools. I was further struck by the principals' lack of understanding related to equity in education. In my view, in schools where staff had a greater understanding of inequalities, there was a focus that took into consideration the diverse backgrounds that students brought with them to school. These schools provided experiences that enriched this diversity and addressed preexisting gaps.

As associate superintendent of schools, a position I held for nine years, I had the opportunity to work primarily with school principals, assisting them in providing leadership to their schools. Through this work I learned of the challenges and dilemmas that school leaders face in their attempts to work with many different school constituencies. The school principal as 'juggler' is a metaphor that most readily comes to mind to describe the work that they do. Through this work I also came to learn that many school principals have very little understanding or knowledge about equality and equity in education. Their understanding of the subject was often limited to fiscal equity.

While in this position, I also had the opportunity as a member of the district senior administration team to work closely with the school trustees and the superintendent in

setting policies for our school district. Once again I found that the trustees' understanding and concern for fairness was often limited to fiscal equity.

For the past four years I have been a principal of an elementary school serving 500 students in the southwest area of the city. The communities served by the school are generally considered to be advantaged communities socio-economically, though there is subsidized housing included in the school's geographical boundaries. On a daily basis I am faced with the wide variety of challenges in working with staff, students, and parents within the framework of the school district to provide an equitable education for all the students in my building. The possibilities are many as I, along with the staff, strive to offer to each of our students the programming that meets their individual needs. This striving also creates many dilemmas. Given the wide range of views, ethnic identities, religious beliefs, and social attitudes represented in our student body, I struggle with achieving a balance in my school between a common cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1996) and the social science of multi-layered diversity, between an inclusive school community and differentiated programming for specific groups. These dilemmas are intensified with the realities of finite resources—both human and fiscal.

A few principals have reputations in our school district for being particularly effective in coming to grips with fairness in their schools. I was interested in exploring the perspectives of one of these principals in addressing issues of fairness related to educational opportunity in the schools—the challenges, the practices, the actions, and the dilemmas. In particular, I was interested in knowing his or her perspectives, what he or she did, and why he or she did what he or she did, in relation to ensuring fullness of educational opportunity for all in the school.

The Question

The purpose of this study was to understand what a principal who is reputed to be effective in dealing with educational opportunity issues in an urban elementary school

does, how the principal chooses the actions in which to engage, and how those actions relate to ensuring full educational opportunity for all students in the school. I wanted to identify and describe the issues, dilemmas, and problems faced by the principal.

The study provides information and insights into the life of one elementary school principal, giving recognition to the fact that a principal works closely with staff, students, parents, and community members in the school. The study further describes the principal's perspectives on enhancing educational opportunities in a school, which may contribute to improving the education for all students. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the principal (Appendix I); through informal conversations with staff; through observations; and through an examination of policies, procedures, practices, and documents in the school.

Schools have traditionally been viewed as the most equalizing institution in our society. As such, they must strive to provide for equity of educational opportunity for all students. Principals have a crucial role in providing the leadership to a school to ensure that policies and procedures affirm fairness.

The following questions were considered as I involved myself with the principal, staff, students, parents, and community members in the school and reflected on what I had experienced:

- What is the principal's perspective on ensuring enhancing educational opportunity in the school setting?
- What are the everyday practices of the school principal, and how are they related to fairness of educational opportunity?
- What initiatives has the principal undertaken to address enhance educational opportunity for all students in the school?
- How are the principal's actions related to ensuring enhancing educational opportunity when dealing with staff, students, parents, and community members?

- What are the dilemmas faced by the principal in addressing educational opportunity issues in the school? How does the principal attempt to resolve them?

Significance of the Study

All schools have a role and responsibility to affirm the concept of fairness related to educational opportunity if we are committed to the principle that all students, regardless of their background, should have equitable opportunities to learn in school. The issue of how we affirm fairness in schools is multidimensional and requires that all members of the school community have a clear understanding of the concept. The role of the principal is critical in the work of any school, and principals are important actors in enhancing educational opportunities for all students. Although there are many studies that have focused on the role of the principal in a school, few have addressed what a principal does to ensure the fairness of educational opportunities provided for students in a school.

This study provides a thick, rich description of the perspectives of one elementary school principal working to ensure enhanced educational opportunities for all students in the school. It provides an understanding of the principal's perspectives, practices, actions, and dilemmas in relation to promoting and affirming fairness in all aspects of the school program.

The findings of the study provide some insights into the experiences of the principal in affirming enhanced educational opportunity and may inform policy makers about the issues that school leaders face in their attempts to address fairness issues in the school. The study may also assist others in the role of school principal and the work that they must do with teachers, students, parents, community members, and district personnel.

On a personal note, the study provided me with the opportunity to examine and extend my personal understanding of equity in education, to gain a deeper understanding

of the concepts related to equity, and to gain further insights from my principal colleague's work as to how I, as a school leader, can be more effective in addressing the equity of educational opportunity for all the students in my school.

Definition of Terms

The term *equity* refers to educational treatments that are appropriate and sufficient to meet the functional characteristics and needs of the persons being educated (Gordon & Bonilla-Bowman, 1999, p. 77).

The term *fairness* refers to providing equal conditions for the achievement of outcomes of all aspects of the school program.

The term *principal* refers to the identified leader of a school. This position is identified in the School Act for schools in Alberta.

Public education is the term used to refer to education funded primarily by the provincial government and for whom governance is carried out though an elected board of trustees.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The study was undertaken on the basis of several assumptions. I assumed that the individuals involved would understand and describe actions in different and unique ways. As well, I assumed that individuals would be able to recall and describe events over an extended period of time with sufficient detail and to recall accurately events from the past.

Another assumption was that an instrumental case study was the appropriate design for this study.

The study was also informed by my belief that leadership involves personality, beliefs, and values, which in turn influence and inform actions in a school setting.

Limitations

This study was limited by the ability of the participant to reflect on personal professional practice and to provide her thoughts and represent her feelings in an articulate manner.

The study may have been further limited by my skills as the investigator in asking questions, listening, being adaptive and flexible, grasping the issues being studied, and recognizing my forestructure in approaching the research.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to one principal working at the elementary school level in a large, urban, public school district in Alberta. The study was carried out with one experienced school principal who has a reputation in the school district for being effective in addressing enhanced educational opportunity issues in the school. The principal had five years in the principal position of the school, allowing the individual sufficient time to bring about change in the school community.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature in the areas of leadership, equity in education, and creating the conditions for enhancing educational opportunities in schools. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in this study, and Chapter 4 includes the major findings of the study. The final chapter contains reflections and discussion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I began this study with a review of the literature in two areas: (a) school leadership and (b) equity and education.

The first phase of the literature review was carried out to examine leadership in a general sense as viewed by educators and to identify current thinking on school leadership. I focused on leadership for the building of community in schools and on instructional leadership. I wanted to determine what had been studied and how it related to the role of the school principal.

The second phase of the literature review focused on examining the literature and research related to equity and education. I wanted to determine how fairness in education was viewed in a general sense and the role of the principal in enhancing educational opportunity in the school.

I determined that in the literature on school leadership, the principal is key to the success of the school. In the literature on equity and education, it is clear that success of a school can be determined by the extent to which it provides full educational opportunities for all of its students. I wanted to know if researchers had determined the role of the principal in achieving equity in the school.

Leadership

Psychological Studies

Early studies of leadership focused on the leader as an individual (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Lipham, Rankin, & Hoeh, 1985; Ohde & Murphy, 1993). The traits, attributes, abilities, or skills of the individual were thought to determine whether the individual would be an effective leader. Nelson and Quick (1994) reported that Stogdill

(1948) concluded that specific learning traits were not necessary, but there must be some relationship between the characteristics of a leader and the characteristics of the followers.

The 'great man' concept of leadership (Bennis, 1989; Lipham et al., 1985; Sashkin & Lassey, 1983) tried to identify what is great about leaders and what makes them so effective. Covey (1989) identified the habits that he contended enhanced the opportunity for leaders to be great. Although there has been much research conducted to determine the characteristics of the 'great man,' there has been little evidence to support the notion that personality is the determining factor in leadership.

Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) have synthesized much of the literature to develop a "portrait in time" of the qualities that make up a leader. The research has shown that there are some qualities that appear to correlate with leadership even though leaders are more different than alike. They concluded that leaders are a little more intelligent than non-leaders, are probably first born and were allowed to make decisions at an early age, are outgoing, and are good communicators; and as proactive people they are not afraid to stretch the rules to get things done (pp. 26-27).

Immegart (1988) contended that the research on the personality of leaders is flawed. There is no distinction between men and women leaders or between managers and leaders. The focus is on the innate characteristics of the individual, described in isolation. The tasks are not differentiated, and the followers are not considered. Foster (1986) stated, "If leadership were to be taken seriously in these theories, then they would have to acknowledge the fact that leadership by definition does not exist in isolation, without followers" (p. 172).

Sociological Studies

Leadership has been studied from the perspective of the leader and the group by researchers such as Katz, Macoby, and Morse (1950), Lipham (1988), and Lipham and

Rankin (1985). Halpin and Winer (1957) developed the Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) to study leader behavior. Other leader behaviors that have been looked at include decision-making strategies (Likert, 1961), orientations to work and people (Blake & Mouton, 1975), and risk taking.

Although these studies considered the group as well as the leader's style, the context in which the leader exercised leadership was ignored. Immegart (1988) criticized style conceptualizations for their rigor and substance. He indicated that the most effective leaders adapted their styles relative to the situation, and thus leadership was necessarily situational.

Socio-psychological Studies

Hemphill (1949) studied leadership from a socio-psychological perspective that identifies the situational nature of leadership. The situational or contingency theories (Fiedler, 1974; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; House & Mitchell, 1974; Yukl, 1981) recognized that the leader and the group vary in their orientation, depending on the nature of the situation.

Anthropological Studies

A more recent theoretical perspective on leadership emphasizes the importance of the leader within the culture of the organization. Values and symbols become critical to the leaders. Individual authors have stressed aspects of culture including visioning and valuing, as well as specific values of trust and collaboration.

Culture

Sergiovanni (1990) identified the power of cultural leadership and defined it as that which "comes from defining, strengthening, and articulating enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its identity over time" (p. 87). His leader as *high priest* bonds together the staff, students, parents, and others to work toward a common

cause. Leadership in his view was made up of heart, head, and hand. For Sergiovanni (2001) the *heart* is what a person believes, values, dreams about, and commits to—that person's vision; the *head* is the theories of practice that the individual develops and the ability to reflect on the theories developed; and the *hand* has to do with the actions taken, the decisions made, and the leadership and management behaviors used as the strategies become institutionalized in the form of school programs, policies, and procedures (p. 321).

Schein (1985) believed that leaders play a vital role in reinforcing culture by where their attention is focused, how they react to crises, how they behave, how they allocate rewards, and how they hire and fire individuals. Sergiovanni (1990) described the situational nature of the leader's role and the necessity to exercise the role to fit the situation. Kotter (1990) supported the importance of culture and concluded that competent leadership can emerge only in certain kinds of cultures. He contended that individual excellence is a necessary condition for organizational excellence.

Bennis (1989, 1993), Bolman and Deal (1991), Cunningham and Gresso (1993), Deal and Peterson (1991), and Sergiovanni (1990) have highlighted the importance of building a strong organizational culture. Bennis (1989) used the metaphor of the leader as social architect studying and shaping the "culture of work" to highlight the transformational role of the leader. Murphy and Beck (1994) reinforced this metaphor and specified the need for principals to acknowledge the changing contexts of schooling. Peters and Austin (1985) used other metaphors for a leader: cheerleader, enthusiast, nurturer of champions, hero finder, wanderer, dramatist, coach, facilitator, builder (p. 265). Deal and Peterson, on the other hand, used the metaphors "symbol, potter, poet, actor and healer" (p. 20) for the leader.

Cunningham and Gresso (1993) suggested that the key to organizational excellence and success is cultural leadership. They stressed that

> the task of leadership is to create and support the culture necessary to foster an attitude of effectiveness in everything that is done within the school. Once this attitude is achieved and supported by the culture; all other aspects of the organization will fall in line. (p. 25)

Values

The importance of culture is signified by the importance attached to values in an organization. Sergiovanni's (1990) symbolic leaders assume the role of "chief" to symbolize what is important and valued in a school. He emphasized moral leadership and value-added leadership.

Sergiovanni (1990) and Foster (1986) described moral leadership from the perspective of culture, professionalism, and ethics. DePree (1989), writing from a corporate perspective, challenged leaders to take a role in developing, expressing, and defending civility and values in their organizations. Smith and Andrews (1989), in a study of instructional leadership, used as their central theme the moral and ethical obligations of principals.

Greenfield (1986) viewed the principal as moral agent and addressed the issue of values in education. He postulated that the new science of administration would be a science "with values and of values" (p. 15). Housego (1993) believed that values are in jeopardy in public education, and the challenge for school leaders is to promote and protect values. He emphasized the importance of the 'fraternal' value of community, implying cooperation, compassion, and compromise.

Patterson (1993) used systems thinking to develop his concept of leadership. In his concept of leadership, values such as openness to shared decision-making and collaboration are critical to successful leadership. Valuing a diversity of perspectives, valuing the healthy resolution of conflict, encouraging reflection on the thinking of self and others, and learning from mistakes were seen as critical values for tomorrow's leader.

Vision

Senge (1990), in describing learning organizations, spoke of the importance of a shared vision and team learning and the role of the leader as designer, steward, and teacher.

Sergiovanni (1994) characterized vision as an "educational platform" that incorporates the school's statement about the preferred aims, methods, and climate, thereby creating a community of mind that establishes behavioral norms. Whitaker and Moses (1994) called it "an inspiring dream, accompanied by a clear scenario of how it will be accomplished" (p. 26). Robert Fritz (1996) identified the unifying effect of visioning and maintained that organizations advance when a clear, widely understood vision creates tension between the real and the ideal, forcing people to work together to decrease the gap and reduce the dissonance.

Others who have specified the importance of visionary leadership include Barth and Pansegrau (1994), Conley (1996), Conley, Dunlap, and Goldman (1992), Fritz (1996), Starratt (1995), and Weiss (1995). Fritz saw the principal playing the pivotal role in shaping the vision for a school. Barth and Pansegrau's image of "growing a vision" and the importance of collaboration and cultivation highlight the importance of the leader being willing to share the vision and take risks in working it through with the group. Conley suggested that principals with heroic inclinations must be willing to release personal ownership when the time comes for implementation of the vision, or the teachers will not commit to it.

In the school setting, Conley et al. (1992) give good reasons to involve teachers at the outset, as they are the ones who have to translate abstract ideas into practical classroom applications. Fritz (1996) advocated a shared process in which everyone is a co-author. Weiss (1995) found that no matter who creates the vision, the principal is its chief instigator, promoter, and guardian.

Conley (1996) highlighted the need to create readiness for the vision by allowing all participants to have the opportunity to examine their current thinking, develop a rationale for change, and consider new models. Starratt (1995) emphasized the importance of institutionalizing the vision and stressed the need for principals to create a climate and a culture for change.

Trust

Bennis (1993) defined *trust* as the glue that binds followers and leaders together. Metaphors provide a powerful means to view leadership, and Greenleaf's (1977) leader-as-servant metaphor points to the importance of a willingness to serve as providing the legitimacy to lead. According to Greenleaf, the leader points the way:

> The one who states the goal must elicit trust, especially if it is a high risk or visionary goal, because those who follow are asked to accept the risk along with the leader. Leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and competence (including judgment) and unless they have a sustaining spirit (entheos) that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal. (p. 16)

Trust in oneself and trust in the relationship of others are important characteristics of a leader (Costa & Garmston, 1994). Integrity, a clear set of values and beliefs, consistency, a knowledge of one's own cognitive style, and taking charge of one's own life signify a trust in oneself. Confidentiality, visibility, accessibility, empathy, and an understanding of the other's sense of personal identity are critical to the building of trust between leaders and followers.

Collaboration

Collaboration has gained importance with the advent of consultative leadership and site-based management. In Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins' (1992) terms, the leader must now be "leading from the back of the band" (p. 6). Leadership responsibilities are to be shared and mutual visions created; the new norm is shared decision making (Kennedy, 1990). The principal's role is crucial in the collaborative effort, and this requires a major

shift in leadership strategy (Liontos & Lashway, 1997). Leaders must be willing to let go of traditional authority roles, allowing teachers to have a greater voice, helping to prepare them, providing support, and establishing an environment of trust.

Transformational or facilitative leadership models emphasize collaboration and empowerment. The term *transformational* was viewed as a personal quality, which has evolved over time to be viewed now as a broad strategy described as 'facilitative.' Conley and Goldman (1994) defined *facilitative* leadership in terms of the behaviors that enhance the collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance. Sergiovanni (1994) defined it as leadership that "keeps on being defined as community builds" (p. 192). Dillard (1995) took the position that the principal's leadership is both transformational and political. She stated, "School principals always work on behalf of particular values, projects, and peoples, those choices arising from their personal subjective understandings of the world and the work" (p. 560).

Facilitative leaders use their authority to support professional give and take, and trust takes on greater importance (Dunlap &Goldman, 1990). Conley and Goldman (1994) cautioned administrators about lapsing into pseudo-facilitative leadership, covertly leading staff to preordained conclusions while using the language of facilitation. Similarly, Hargreaves (1997) referred to administrators attempting to mandate collaboration using hierarchical methods as "contrived collegiality."

Leithwood (1994), Leithwood and Janzi (1990), and Leithwood, Janzi, and Fernandez (1996) have developed a model of transformational leadership in education. They have identified seven dimensions of transformational leadership: (a) creating a school vision, (b) setting high performance expectations, (c) creating consensus around group goals, (d) developing an intellectually stimulating climate, (e) creating a productive school culture and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions, (f) offering individualized support, and (g) modeling best practices and organizational values.

Collaboration must extend beyond the culture of the school. The principal, as a person in the community, must enhance his or her public-relations skills. Bridging boundaries, demonstrating collegiality, and celebrating diversity are required skills.

Building Community in Schools

Sergiovanni (1994) introduced the metaphor of community to replace the metaphor of organization to describe schools. The use of the term *community* can be found in both theory and practice; it describes a collection of people who have come together due to their shared experience and history or their shared norms, beliefs, values, and goals. This conception of community is one of homogeneity and becomes problematic given the increasingly diverse and complex nature of public schooling. Some current views of school as community include communities of otherness (Furman-Brown (1999) and community of difference (Shields, in press).

In a community of difference, Shields (in press) proposed that given the increasing diversity in schools, they must become environments where students learn to live together in peace and justice and prepare for a diverse, global society beyond school. Her conceptualization of a community of difference is

> not based on the assumption of implicit common norms that exist in more homogeneous communities, but on explicit, new, and agreed-upon understandings. In a *community of difference,* the commonalities are values of inclusivity, respect, and a desire to understand diverse perspectives; the norms are commitment to reflection, critique and dialogue. Such norms do not merely reflect the customs of an already powerful or established group, but are constantly subject to re-examination and renegotiation to best address the needs of all members. (pp. 8-9)

This notion of a community of difference can be easily applied to schools where diversity in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, or language is visible. It is equally and more importantly applicable to schools where diversity may be invisible—diversity in class, religion, sexual orientation, or ability (Shields, in press, p. 10). If principals are to exercise leadership in diverse schools, it now becomes necessary that they develop the

concept of cross-cultural leadership. Shields stated that in order to provide cross-cultural leadership, "educators will need a robust understanding of leadership, one that has the potential to transform both our understanding of leadership and the school communities in which they work" (p. 13).

Instructional Leadership

Studies devoted to school leaders have tended to focus on instructional leadership, and the definitions for instructional leadership are as varied as the studies. If the primary purpose of schooling is to provide instruction to students, then it could be argued that everything that a principal does in a school is geared towards instructional leadership.

Smith and Andrews (1989) suggested the following characteristics for a principal who displays strong instructional leadership: (a) places priority on curriculum and instruction issues; (b) is dedicated to the goals of the school and the school district; (c) is able to rally and mobilize resources to accomplish the goals of the district and the school; (d) creates a climate of high expectations in the school characterized by a tone of respect for teachers, students, parents, and community; (e) functions as a leader with direct involvement in instructional policy; (f) continually monitors student progress toward school achievement; (g) demonstrates commitment to academic goals; (h) effectively consults with others by involving the faculty and other groups in school decision processes; (i) effectively and efficiently mobilizes resources such as materials, time, and support; and (j) recognizes time as a scarce resource and creates order and discipline by minimizing factors that may disrupt the learning process (pp. 8-9).

Andrews and Soder (1987b), Andrews, Huston, and Soder (1985), and Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby (1985) have found that when these characteristics are used to group schools according to the perceptions of the teachers of their principals as strong, average, or weak instructional leaders, there were significant differences in the incremental growth in student achievement. They found further that in their analyses of student achievement

outcomes, schools operated by strong instructional leaders exhibited significantly greater gain scores in achievement in reading and mathematics than did schools operated by average and weak instructional leaders.

Factors Affecting Instructional Leadership

Leithwood et al. (1992) and Leithwood and Steinbach (1991, 1993) in their studies on school leadership distinguished between expert and typical principals. Leithwood et al. concluded that school leaders' practices are influenced by four types of external factors: the principals' role (e.g., expectations, complexity); a large cluster of influences concerning the attitudes, abilities, and behaviors of others (e.g., teachers' willingness to innovate); characteristics of the school system (e.g., district policies, procedures); and the principal's own background (e.g., training and socialization experiences).

Leithwood, Cousins, and Begley (1992) have determined the specific components of training programs for schools leaders, even though the research suggested that school leadership is for the most part situational. Dwyer (1986), Louis and Miles (1990), and Tye (1985) illustrated through the use of case studies the importance of context in selecting and using leadership strategies.

Instructional Leadership Functions

Brookover et al. (1982), working from a socio-psychological perspective of leadership, identified activities and functions which instructional leaders must accomplish effectively: instructional objectives, student assessment, school learning-climate assessment, comprehensive planning, efficient use of faculty meetings, concentration on instructional problems, and establishment of a file of objectives. This list is an arbitrary construction and makes no assessment of the school culture itself. This model does not take into account the situational nature of each setting and each leader.

In an integrated vision of instructional leaders, Duke (1987) identified seven functions, which instructional leaders must handle: teacher supervision and development, teacher evaluation, instructional management and support, resource management, quality control, coordination, and troubleshooting. Duke recognized the situational nature of leadership and did not prescribe the same actions for all principals.

Krug (1992) established a five-category taxonomy for what instructional leaders do: define mission, manage curriculum and instruction, supervise teachers, monitor student progress, and promote instructional climate. In a study of 81 principals' perceptions and interpretations of their own activities, he concluded that it was not what the principals were engaged in that defined effectiveness, but how they approached their work, guided by their own distinctive set of beliefs.

Much of the research on instructional leadership is repetitive. Little emphasis has been placed on documenting leaders' functioning in schools and asking why leaders choose the actions that they do.

Summary

The literature on school leadership has stressed the importance of working within a culture and of having a vision based on shared values in working to achieve shared goals. Trust and collaboration have replaced competition, hierarchy, and rules.

What is missing in the literature is how a principal achieves this in an elementary school where diversity, teacher autonomy, and a demand for a potpourri of programs may be the most evident features. There is a silence in literature on the nature of the leadership required to ensure fullness of educational opportunity, a silence that this study will attempt to address.

Equity and Education

Social Justice and Education

Public education is central to the promise of democracy. In modern-day democratic societies, the achievement of universally effective education can be achieved only in contexts in which social justice are valued and practiced (Brown, 1985; Coons et al., 1970; Gordon, 1999). Society has tended to think of social justice as a value that we are morally committed to pursue for the underprivileged, for ethnic minorities, or for any low-status group. The relationship between education and social justice is symbiotic and thus cannot be separated. Furthermore, the concept of "fairness" is related to concepts of equity and equality. Therefore, the discussion begins with these terms.

Throughout the literature that I reviewed, the terms *equity* and *equality* are used synonymously and interchangeably. Traditionally, our society has sought to address the question of equity in education by trying to ensure that all students have equal access to the opportunity for an adequate education (Gordon & Bonilla-Bowman, 1999). This conception of equity rests on the notion of distributive equality: equal access to equal resources. Three examples of this conception of equity from the United States are the struggle for school desegregation in the United States, school finance equity cases, and cases concerning the instruction of students with limited proficiency in English. In the first case, the argument that was presented was that forced segregation based on race resulted in unequal educational opportunity (Meroë, 1999). In the school finance challenges, the plaintiffs argued that the financing of public education through property taxes was inequitable and unconstitutional (Coons et al., 1970). In the Lau vs. Nichols decision, it was the failure of the school to provide instruction in the language of the student that was considered to result in unequal access to education (Gordon, 1999).

Rawls (1971) provided another perspective on equity. In his work on justice he identified two principles that are specifically applicable to educational equity: the

principle of just savings and the principle of unequal distribution of resources in favor of the weakest members of society. The principle of just savings holds that a society is free to limit its distribution of resources in order to save some resources for future generations. The principle of unequal distribution of resources is conditioned on the use of these resources in service to the weakest members of society. Thus the accumulation of resources in reserve, while some members of society suffer, can be justified only in service of savings for future generations. Under the second principle, justice can prevail only when the resources are distributed unequally to meet the needs of the weakest members of society, because they may require more than others.

Gordon (1999) cautioned us that care must be taken to make the difference between equity and equality clear. He states "equity speaks to fairness and social justice while equality connotes the sameness and the absence of discrimination" (p. 124). Iseke-Barnes and Wane (2000) stated, "An equality paradigm focuses on maintaining equal experiences for all students regardless of their backgrounds while an equity paradigm creates equivalent experiences for all students, taking into account their various backgrounds and needs" (p. 386). One of the fundamental tenets of social justice is that it provides for the unequal distribution of resources to favor the weaker members of society. The equal distribution of resources in a society that has unequal members would not be equitable. Thus, it would be more appropriate to speak of the equity of educational opportunity and not the equality of educational opportunity.

Gordon and Shipman (1979) introduced the concept of distributional appropriateness and sufficiency as essential criteria for equity in human services. Under this notion of equity, educational treatments, like medical treatments, must be appropriate to the condition and characteristics of the person being treated and sufficient to their support and correction. To give all patients penicillin drugs when they need sulfa drugs does not meet the condition of sufficiency. Thus emerges the notion of differential educational treatments in relation to need and circumstance as criteria for educational

equity, where justice is defined not so much by treating all in the same way but by the appropriateness and sufficiency of treatment to the functional characteristics and needs of the persons being educated (Gordon, 1999).

Enhancing Educational Opportunity

In North America, a commonly held view of education is that it provides access to social mobility and that such access is based on the equity of educational opportunity. Many believe that a good education is the key to success and that it will unlock the door to economic opportunity, enabling disadvantaged groups or individuals to improve their lot in life dramatically (Levin, 1995; Mickelson & Smith, 1992).

Mickelson and Smith (1992) suggested the need to distinguish between the terms *equality*, *equality of opportunity*, and *equality of educational opportunity*. They stated that equality of opportunity might help to bridge the gap between democratic theory, which preaches equality, and economic practice, which makes social equality rarely attainable. They made a distinction between equality of opportunity, which is based on a number of social factors, and equality of educational opportunity. They believed that equality of opportunity is made possible because of equality of educational opportunity and used the 'life as a game' metaphor to illustrate their point:

> If life is a game, the playing field must be level; if life is a race the starting line must be in the same place for everyone. For the playing field to be level, many believe education is crucial, giving individuals the wherewithal to compete in the allegedly meritocratic system. Thus, equality of opportunity hinges on the equality of educational opportunity. (p. 360)

According to Grossman (1998), socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity are associated with educational inequality wherever they occur in the world. As a result, he believed that most educational systems are rife with inequality.

Kozol (1991) used the term *savage inequalities* to describe instances in which the educational system maintains an un-level playing field and an overwhelmingly unfair

contest in which the consequences have a 'terrible finality' (p. 180). He went on to say that such inequalities in schooling have lasting effects on the children who experience them, as opposed to a game that can be replayed to achieve better results:

> We are children only once; and after those few years are gone, there is no second chance to make amends. Those who are denied cannot be made whole by a later act of government. Those who get the unfair edge cannot be later stripped of what they've won. The only argument is justice. But justice, poorly argued, is no match for the acquired ingenuity of the successful. The fruits of inequality, in this respect, are self-confirming. (p. 180)

The principle of equal opportunity has been an important part of the ideology, which has influenced public education in democratic societies in the past 100 years (Pulliam, 1999). Through the educational system, every child should have the opportunity to make the fullest use of his or her potential. Although education does not eliminate inequality completely, one could argue that it should foster talent among children in the lower structures of society and reduce unfair advantages to children in higher positions. Thus, access to schooling should be a means of ensuring that children end up in a position in society that is commensurate with their abilities and motivation and not merely their place at birth. What the education system today ensures is that all children have equality of access, but not necessarily equality of educational opportunity.

Porter (1965) stated that although there is general agreement in society as to the desirability of fostering equality in society, there is less agreement as to whether this should take the form of equality of condition or equality of opportunity. Equality of condition implies that whatever is valued as good in the society, such as material resources, health, personal development, and leisure, should be distributed among all members of society in the same amounts regardless of the social position that one occupies. Equality of opportunity, on the other hand, implies a society in which resources are distributed unequally and in which access is open to all without regard to one's social class origins, parental resources, religious affiliations, membership in minority groups, or

sex. Brown (1985) clarified this further by stating that "each person has an equal right to education according to need, regardless of whether he is fortunate or unfortunate in natural endowments or in the social conditions of his upbringing" (p. 254).

Equity of Educational Opportunity and Pedagogy

Gordon (1999) described education as perhaps the quintessential human enterprise. Human beings educate other human beings. We teach each other how to learn, how to think, how to develop and use techniques and technologies, and how to generate and apply concepts, numbers, and information to address problems and situations both real and abstract. Education is by its nature both a social and a highly personal process. The process is social because it is initiated, guided, and mediated by others. It is highly personal in that without the engagement of the learner, education would not be fully experienced. It is a process that learners must experience for themselves. Those of us who teach can only guide and mediate those experiences (p. xii).

Rodriguez (1991) defined equity in education as the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who are entitled to participate and enjoy the benefits of an education. Equity in education is based on the premise that all students—regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, native language, age, social or economic status, family structure and lifestyles, religious preference, or disability—have the right to an education of equal quality (p. 13). Thus, equity by this definition is expansive and is about all people and for all people. He further stated that equity is three things: a concept, an educational reform, and a process, and that it is concerned with the overall policies that our school systems and schools endorse and reinforce. Equity is concerned mainly with achievement at all levels, and any philosophy for schooling must focus on raising the achievement level of all students and also provide opportunities for all students to participate as critical and productive members of a democratic society (p. 13). Equity demands fairness and the real possibility of equality of outcomes for a broader range of

students, and it is a structuring of priorities, commitments, and processes to reflect the diversity in our schools. The activities, strategies, and approaches we use in schools to prepare young people for productive and critical participation in a democratic and pluralistic society must reflect this reality.

In order to affirm equity in educational opportunity, Grossman (1998), Iseke-Barnes and Wane (2000), and Young and Levin (1998) stated that the criteria for educational equity must encompass the notion of differential educational treatments in relation to need and circumstance. Justice is defined by the appropriateness and sufficiency of treatment to the functional characteristics and needs of the persons being educated. Gordon (1999) identified six components of an effective and equitable education:

1. Adequacy of human and material resources
2. Structural organization of schools
3. Quality of teaching and learning
4. Learning behaviors and attitudes of students
5. Support for academic learning: communities and families
6. Affective development. (p. 77)

Adequacy of Human and Material Resources

One of the premises of enhancing educational opportunity is that human and material resources are appropriate and sufficient to meet the educational needs of each learner. Gordon (1999) and Iseke-Barnes and Wane (2000) stated that the notion of differential treatment in relation to needs implies that educational practices will be adapted to the functional characteristics of the learner (p. 77). They identified two areas that will need special focus: (a) teacher competence and (b) instructional materials. In order for education to be truly adaptive, teachers must be able to specify the learning needs of each student and the conditions under which they are likely to be met. Teachers must be able to conduct assessments that can inform teaching and learning. The assessment should provide information about the learner in such areas as prior learning,

strengths and weaknesses, learning style, conditions of probable learning, task engagement, and sources of motivation and engagement. In order to do this, teachers will need to be trained and provided with the time to carry out these assessments as part of their teaching assignments. Wang (1992) and Walberg (1984), in their work on adaptive learning environments, and Glaser (1992) and Klausmeier (1977), in their work on individually prescribed instruction, further supported the need for teacher competence in assessing student needs.

The resources represented by the students are also an important part of the human resources in the educational process. Students who have a high quality of physical and mental health are able to engage more actively in the learning process. There is ample evidence that there is a positive relationship between good health and success in school (Birch & Gussow, 1976).

Gordon (1999) stated further that for effective learning to occur, students must (a) actively engage in the learning experience, (b) spend time on appropriate learning tasks, (c) purposefully deploy their attention and efforts at relevant learning goals, and (d) access and utilize human and material learning resources. These learner behaviors appear to be acquired as part of the incidental learning of some students from economically and socially advantaged families. They tend to be notably absent in many children from less privileged backgrounds. These health conditions and behaviors of learners must be considered in any determination of the deployment of resources.

Adaptive learning requires that instructional materials vary in respect to level of demand, breadth and depth of content, cultural representation, flexibility of use, and a host of other conditions in response to both learner and teacher needs. Grossman (1998) stated that students learn more and feel better about themselves and school when their culture is included in the curriculum. He stated further that students who maintain rather than reject their cultural heritage and ethnic background are better adjusted and more likely to succeed academically and vocationally (p. 121).

Structural Organization of Schools

Gordon (1999) stated that a primary concern in the structural organization of schools is the creation of contexts that provide for personalization in the interactions of all the parties involved—students, teachers, parents, administrators, and members of the school community. Opportunities for personal interaction are influenced most importantly by the adult-to-learner ratios, the size of the primary structural unit, and the philosophical purposes served by the overall organization. Lower teacher-to-learner ratios as well as continuity in the interaction of teacher and learner increase the probability for personalization in a school.

Young and Levin (1998) argued against a standardized model of schooling. They challenged educators to move from organizing groups to organizing for individuals. They stated further that schools must look at issues of grouping, motivation, classroom control, evaluation, and special education in considering new possibilities. Many schools have been addressing this issue by limiting class and school size, creating schools within schools and family groupings, and having a teacher or a group of teachers stay with a group of students for more that one year.

Quality of Teaching and Learning Transactions

The purposes and ends of the resources and structural characteristics of a school are codependent on the quality of the teaching and learning transactions that occur in a school. Bloom (1968), Edmonds (1979), Sizer (1984), and others provided convincing evidence of the need to pay attention to the quality of teaching and learning processes. For teachers these processes include (a) structuring and adapting learning environments (Guskey, 1990; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992; Medway, 1991; Wang, 1992), (b) mediating learning experiences, (c) using diagnostic and monitoring information to prescribe learning experiences and to inform the improvement of teaching and learning (Davies & Politano, 1992; Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1993), (d) modeling the behaviors

they expect of students (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pearson, 1985), and (e) using processes of assessment and evaluation that are grounded in and facilitative of teaching and learning (Paschal, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1984; Walberg, 1991). For learners, they need to engage in learning tasks that are appropriate to the mastery of the subject, and they must deploy their energies and aptitudes to these learning tasks (Walberg, 1991). The learning process can be enabled or disabled by the nature of the relationship between teachers and learners. Respect, trust, and confidence are essential ingredients for an enabling relationship. Research has clearly demonstrated that positive teacher expectations improve behavior and increase achievement (Brookover et al., 1997; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Taylor, 1995). In instances in which the teacher expectation is limited by class, ethnicity, gender, or other biases, enhancing educational opportunity for all students becomes a more complex and difficult problem to surmount (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Grossman, 1998). Students interacting with each other need a healthy social climate that supports the learning endeavor. The learning that occurs between students can sometimes be as effective as or more effective than the learning that takes place with a teacher in and out of the classroom. Positive learning behaviors, modeled in cooperative and collaborative learning situations can be powerful enablers for learning (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992). On the other hand, negative role modeling and peer pressure can be a limiting factor in the achievement of certain groups who see academic success as a negation of their ethnic and personal identity (Welch & Hodges, 1997).

Learning Behaviors and Attitudes of Students

Because learning is a personal endeavor, the attitudes and the learning behaviors become critical components of effective schooling. Gordon and Armour-Thomas (1991) stated that attention should be given to the often-neglected variable of disposition—the attitudinal and habitual readiness to receive and respond in specific ways or *habit of*

mind, to use Gardner's (1993) term. Some aspects of disposition are thought of as products of incidental learning, such as the disposition to explore, inquire, and examine. These are thought to be the result of exposure to others who model such tendencies. For students who do not have a disposition for academic endeavors, the school will need to build into the curriculum whatever experiences will be likely to reshape such dispositions. Attitudinal and habitual readiness behaviors are learned in highly personalized, effectively important teaching and learning transactions and through incidental and informal channels. Many of these behaviors are highly effective in the achievement of out-of-school ends and could possibly be equally effective in academic endeavors (Bonilla-Bowman, 1999). If schools attach importance to attitudinal and readiness traits in the learning process, then it is incumbent on them to help students recognize their value in academic pursuits. Only then will we be able to ensure enhanced educational opportunity for all students.

Support for Academic Learning-Families and Communities

A great deal has been written about how family circumstances affect educational outcomes. Much of this literature has attempted to link school success with particular family characteristics and to explain school failure in terms of families that lack these desired qualities. This approach is inadequate for two reasons. It leaves unquestioned the organization of the schools, the curriculum, and the practices of teachers. It is also particularly dangerous as it gives educational practitioners a stereotype of students that encourages them to expect success from certain students and failure from others—factors that have nothing to do with the abilities of the child.

There is another strand of the literature that is more useful and stresses the development of a strong and positive relationship between families and schools (Young & Levin, 1998). Fullan (1997a) took the position that nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families working together in partnership. He

furthered this notion by saying that positive forms of parent involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation; they happen by explicit strategic intervention (pp. 42-43). Programs such as Parents as Partners developed by the York Board of Education in Toronto (Shuttleworth, 1986), IMPACT (Merttens, Newland, & Webb, 1996) in Britain, and the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) process developed by Joyce Epstein and Karen Salinas (1991) of John Hopkins University in the United States foster this type of initiative.

Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla (1995) have conducted a comprehensive survey of the research on parental involvement. Some of their findings were that (a) when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic or racial background, or the parent educational level; (b) the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement; (c) when parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to attend postsecondary education; and (d) the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which that student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning; communicates high, yet reasonable expectations for their child's achievement and future careers; and becomes involved in their children's
education. Graue, Weinstein, and Walberg (1983) found that it was not just the economic and educational status of the family that affects achievement; it was also the family's use of resources and the way in which the family supported academic development that made the difference. These findings can serve schools well as they strive to ensure enhanced educational opportunity for all students.

Affective Development

Duffy and Jonassen (1992) stated that the affective and cognitive components of human behavior are highly symbiotic and that it would be meaningless to try to separate

them. Students who understand their own values and those of others can associate values with positive and productive courses of action (Association for the Advancement of Health Education, 1992). Although participation in social discourse requires intellectual competence, an adequate sense of self, empathy, a relatedness to others, and the identification of a set of values that frame one's life are just as critical to make life meaningful (Gordon, 1999; Iseke-Barnes & Wane, 2000). If this is true, then schools must strive to develop simultaneously with each learner individually.

Leadership for Enhancing Educational Opportunity

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1995) stated, "Any system of meaning that we develop for our schools must be just, optimistic, empathetic and democratic" (p. 2). *Empathy* refers to all members of the school community having a sense of belonging; *democratic* refers to the right to access, fairness, and participation; *justice* ensures that every voice is heard—not just that of those with power; and *optimism* refers to the hope that the leader must bring to the present and for the future. They challenged educational leaders to use these criteria as benchmarks for assessing decisions about changes in schools.

Shields (in press) challenged school leaders to ask some fundamental questions about every aspect of schooling in the quest to find justice and unity in diversity:

> The educational leaders wanting to create community out of difference and find unity in diversity will ultimately learn to ask, and help others to ask, some fundamental questions about every aspect of schooling—whether it is classroom grouping, curriculum materials, pedagogical choices, governance issues, school rules or extra-curricular activities. Such questions might include: Who benefits; who is disadvantaged? Who is included; who excluded? Who is marginalized; who privileged? Who is legitimated; who devalued? (p. 46)

In order to create enhanced learning environments for all students, school leaders will need to identify the boundaries for change, clarify values, ensure a focused and just learning environment, challenge inequities in the status quo, and identify some criteria against which to assess decision making and collective action (p. 41).

Summary

Fullness of educational opportunity is a right of every child in a democracy. Classrooms and schools have so much to contribute to how 'fair' life is for children and to the chances that they have to grasp what education has to offer. As educators, we have a moral obligation and a collective responsibility to affirm this ideal. The principal has the primary role in ensuring that fairness emerges as the underlying principle in all aspects of life in a school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

Principal leadership constitutes the theoretical framework for this study. Leadership provides the focus for examining and understanding the practices, actions, and dilemmas of a school principal in creating the conditions for enhanced educational opportunities for all students.

Philosophical Stance

This study was carried out using a qualitative, instrumental case study paradigm (Merriam, 1998). Some philosophical assumptions guide the use of this research paradigm. These philosophical assumptions are related to views about multiple realities, an interest in meaning, the influence of the researcher on the researched, and the intimate familiarity of the researcher with the phenomenon being studied.

Multiple Realities

One of the assumptions of the interpretive research stance is the existence of multiple realities. Qualitative research, which encompasses the interpretive stance, assumes that

> there are multiple realities—the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. In this paradigm there are no pre-determined hypotheses, no treatment and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment. What one does is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting—hence the term naturalistic inquiry. (Merriam, 1998, p. 17)

I assumed that there would be multiple realities and understandings held by all of the participants in this study. I spent an extended period of time in one school and observed

the actions of one elementary school principal and her interactions with staff, students, parents, and community members. Being a part of the school setting for an extended period of time allowed me to write about not only the principal's beliefs and perceptions but also those of the other participants. My goal was to understand the principal's leadership through an understanding of the multiple realities of the students, the staff, the parents, and the community members. I assumed that I would have different interpretations for the various experiences of students, staff, parents, and community members; and I have included these in this study.

Interest in Meaning

The primary objective in using an interpretive paradigm is to understand the meaning of an experience. Patton (1990) explained:

> [Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)

I sought to understand the meaning of the principal's leadership in the school—her perspectives, practices, and actions; the basis for her actions; and the dilemmas that she faced in providing leadership. I recognized the fact that a principal works closely with staff, student, parents, and community members; hence I sought to understand their perspectives as well.

The ongoing reflection by the principal and the numerous informal contacts that I had with staff, students, parents, and community members facilitated a deeper understanding of the principal's leadership in the school. The time spent with the

principal as she reflected on her practice also provided invaluable insights and added to the meaning and interpretation of what was observed.

Influence of the Researcher on the Researched

I assumed that I would have an influence on the principal. Owens (1982) stated, "It is illusory to suppose that the interaction between the inquirer and subject may be eliminated. Indeed, this dynamic relationship can make it practicable for the inquirer, himself or herself, to become the data-gathering and processing 'transducer'" (p. 6).

The participant and I had a healthy and trusted collegial relationship prior to the initiation of this study. I believe that this trust enabled honest and candid sharing between us. I am certain that the other participants sensed this trust and thus were willing to open up to me and allow me to enter spaces that I would otherwise have not been able to access. I endeavored to be sensitive to the context and to be flexible in my approach to data gathering. In my observations, I expanded my sensitivity to the nonverbal aspects of the context for the principal's leadership. I took every opportunity to clarify and summarize as the study evolved. This was particularly valuable as I tried to make sense of anomalous responses from the participants.

Familiarity With the Phenomenon

In qualitative case study the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Guba and Lincoln (1985) differentiated the human researcher from other data collection instruments. "They emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke and create for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there" (p. 149). This necessitates becoming intimately familiar with the phenomenon being studied.

Through my many varied experiences as an educational leader in a large school district, I have an intimate familiarity with school leadership. I could relate to all of what was happening in the school, and I felt empathy for the role that the principal had in her

school. Although I observed individual bits in the life of this principal, I tried to relate in a holistic way. I was part of some events from beginning to end. In instances in which I was there only for the beginning, Bernice stayed in touch and kept me informed of the outcome. We continue to stay in touch about what is happening in the school, and she has recruited me to be a mentor for a child for the upcoming school year. Bernice provided me with many opportunities to learn in her school, demonstrating that she is a coach and mentor to those other than her staff.

Selection of the Participant

The case in this study is one elementary school principal. Chien (1981) and Patton (1990) postulated that the most appropriate means of selecting a case is through purposeful sampling. Through this method, the researcher selects information-rich cases for study in depth. Lecompte and Preissle (1993) used the term *criterion-based selection* (p. 69) to select cases for the study. In criterion-based selection, the researcher creates a list of attributes that are essential and critical to the study and then proceeds to find cases that match the criteria.

For the purposes of this study, I selected the principal on the basis of several criteria. The individual is considered by the superintendent to be an effective school principal and is known for promoting school policies and practices that promote enhanced educational opportunities for all students. The individual has had at least three years in the role of principal of the school. It is my belief that in order to look at the issue of programming to meet the needs of all students, a principal must have had some time to work with the students, staff, parents, and community before she could speak knowledgeably on the topic. Less than three years in the role of principal of the school would not be sufficient time to accomplish this. Also, the individual is a reflective practitioner who is articulate in conveying her thoughts and feelings, and she feels confident about doing so.

I have known this individual for many years as a teaching and principal colleague, and I am confident that the relationship that exists between us allowed for open and honest conversations related to the questions and issues identified.

Data Gathering

Having selected a qualitative approach for my study, I used the major data-gathering strategies of semis-structured interviews, reflective conversations based on observations, informal conversations, document analyses, and artifact examination.

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the role of the principal in creating the conditions for enhanced educational opportunities in a school. I used interviewing and observation as the primary means of gathering data. I used semi-structured interviews with the participant and was guided by the Three Interview Series described by Schuman (1982). The first set of interviews focused on the life history of the participant, the second set of interviews on the details of the experiences of the participant in dealing with enhanced educational opportunities issues in the school, and the third set of interviews on the participant's reflection on the meaning of the experiences shared in the second set of interviews. The interviews were carried out over a span of eight weeks in the school. The interviews were taped and transcribed, allowing me to transform the principal's spoken words into a written text to study. Taping the interviews also increased the accuracy of the data and allowed me to engage in ongoing interpretation during the study.

I endeavored to use the notion of 'the forward and backward arc' (Packer & Addison, 1989) to make initial sense of not only the participant but also the data throughout the data-gathering phase of the study. In the forward arc, I used my 'forestructure'—my existing preconceptions, pre-understandings, or prejudices—to interpret the data. In the backward arc, I evaluated the initial interpretation and attempted

to see what went unseen before. In this process, I sought to determine what was present in and also what was absent from the data.

For eight weeks prior to carrying out the interviews, I spent extended periods of time in the school observing the principal interacting with students, staff, parents, and community members. As the researcher, I attempted to engage in the process systematically. Boostrom (1994) described the stages of a researcher engaged in observation: first, the researcher as a 'video-camera' receiving visual and aural stimuli; second, the researcher as a 'playgoer' drawn into the lives of the participants; and third, the researcher as 'evaluator' having evaluative thoughts about what is being observed. I maintained extensive field notes throughout the period of research, documenting my observations in the form of descriptions, quotations, and comments.

Because school leadership is a highly interactive process, observing the principal allowed me to acquire knowledge of her context. It further provided me with information that I used to refine my questions and guide the dialogue during the semi-structured interviews.

In addition to interviews and observations, I had the opportunity to speak to staff, students, parents, and community members. I had originally intended to jot down notes from my conversations. Once at the site, I determined that it would be more effective and efficient to schedule and tape the conversations with the staff, parents, and community members. The school provided release time for the teachers and arranged the time for conversations with the parents and community members. I also examined documents such as school newsletters, the school plan, and classroom newsletters, as well as artifacts such as the school handbook created by the principal for the school. Wolcott (1992) observed that data collected in these ways is about "asking, watching and reviewing" (p. 19).

My goal was to understand the principal and her leadership and how that leadership related to provision of enhanced educational opportunities in the school. I

wanted to discover what happened in the school with her leadership, how it happened, and why it happened. I also wanted to know what dilemmas she faced in providing leadership to her school.

I began data gathering after the Christmas break. I spent much of the term between Christmas and spring break shadowing the principal, observing, and talking with students, staff, parents, and community members. I also participated in staff meetings, in student activities, and special activities. I found that by the end of this period of time I had sufficient rich information about the principal's leadership and the school. During the following two months, I made several phone calls and informal visits to the school to clarify bits of information and my understanding of happenings. If the principal was not available at the school, I would receive a phone call from her in the evening or on the weekend. I shared my drafts with the principal, and she provided me with additional information to clarify points made in the drafts. By the end of this period of time, I was confident that I had gathered sufficient data and that I had come to a good understanding of Bernice's leadership and the school.

Shadowing and Observing

I shadowed the principal for the first four weeks of my stay in the school. When I arrived at the school each morning, I joined her in her office, and we would chat as she prepared for the start of the school day. For the first four weeks, I went everywhere she went. I joined her on her daily walk through the school, and as we walked we chatted about the school and my observations. If she met people in the hallways, she introduced me to them. I stayed out of her conversations and became involved only when she invited me to make a comment. The invitation was extended often.

When I was with her in her office, I sat in one of the high-back chairs across from her desk. Her office is quite small, and when students or others came to see her, it would get quite crowded in the room. On these occasions I would pull my chair back and try to

stay out of the way. Due to the arrangement of the furniture in the room, I often found myself in the "thick of things" with students and other visitors. I attempted to write in my notebook during these times, but found that the cramped space was not conducive to writing. The writing was usually done when the visitors had left.

When someone I did not know came into the office, Bernice introduced me and explained my purpose in the school. She always asked their permission to include me in the meeting. I was included in all meetings except one in which Bernice was doing a performance evaluation summary with a teacher. Although I was not part of the meeting with the teacher, the teacher did give Bernice permission to share information with me.

In staff meetings that were held in the faculty room, Bernice insisted that I sit at the large table with the rest of the staff. To avoid participation, I kept my notebook in front of me and made notations during the meeting. I focused on listening and observing.

After the first four weeks, my observations varied. I became more insightful about situations and observed only in situations when I felt that it would add to my understanding of either Bernice's leadership or the life of the school.

Reflective Conversation

Whenever time was available during the day, I engaged the principal in reflective conversation. This happened in her office and also as we walked about the school. If we were in her office, I made notes during the conversations. Reflections shared during our walkabouts were jotted down as soon as we returned to her office.

On a daily basis in the evening, I reviewed the day's notes and identified issues that needed more clarification. I also noted questions that arose from my reading of the notes of observations and the reflective conversations. These questions related to my understanding of an issue or event and were answered by Bernice at the beginning of the next day.

Semi-structured Interviews With the Participant

I had three semi-structured interviews with the principal, with each session lasting approximately three-and-a-half hours. Two of the three interview sessions were held away from the school, because both the participant and I felt the need to find a space where there would be no interruptions. The third interview session was held in the school, and, as expected, there were several interruptions. All three sessions were taped and the tapes transcribed. The transcriptions were made available to the participant for her review. She made several corrections, though she did not add to or delete any of the data. Together, we negotiated the interpretation of some of the data.

Yin (1998) suggested that an examination of documents and artifacts could provide specific details to corroborate information from other sources. I examined the documents and artifacts that were made available to me. This furthered my understanding of the principal's perspectives, actions, practices, and dilemmas. They were also helpful in verifying names, titles, and spellings that were mentioned in the interviews.

Conversations With Students, Staff, Parents, and Community Members

From the very beginning of my time in the school, no one hesitated to talk with me. After the first few days, students would greet me by name in the hallways, and staff appeared to be comfortable with my presence in the school. When I was not observing the principal, I attempted to spend time talking informally with students, staff, parents, or community members. My questions to them related to their views of life at Wildwood School. Often I found that these conversations were rushed, and I decided that it would be more effective to schedule time to have informal conversations with these participants. I selected several staff members, and the school identified the students, parents, and community members and contacted them on my behalf. The school arranged the times for my meetings with them and provided me with an office where I could have the conversations without being interrupted. I taped the conversations and had them

transcribed. None of the participants wanted to see the transcriptions when they were offered to them, though one individual came back to me to correct a figure to which she had made reference in our conversation. I also offered to meet with those individuals whose comments I had included in the study to ensure that in editing their words I had not misrepresented them. I was assured by all that they did not feel that this was necessary and that they would wait to receive a copy of my dissertation.

Document Analysis and Artifact Examination

I asked the principal to provide me with documents that she had created. I was provided with the parent handbook, all the school newsletters for the year, and staff meeting agendas. I was also provided with the school plan, the provincial achievement test results, the attitude survey results, research reports relating to programs in the school, and several documents that were produced for special events at the school. Whenever I asked for a document, it was immediately made available to me, and even when I did not ask, documents were provided if the principal felt that it might add to my understanding of her leadership or the school. This action gave me an insight into the principal's leadership.

Field Notes

I wrote field notes during my time in the school, and people got used to seeing me with my purple book in hand. Most of the notes related to the tone of conversations, important names, or questions that I needed to ask the principal. The notes were taken in long hand, though they did include my own version of shorthand for some words.

Each evening I reviewed the tapes and noted things that I should observe for the following day. I also reviewed my field notes and added details that I did not have time to add during my time in the school. This allowed me to identify things that I should observe for the next day.

Data Analysis

Every evening on my return home, I wrote in a journal my reflections on what I had observed in the school. Additionally, I listened to tapes, reviewed my field notes, and examined documents and artifacts. I then listed the points that needed follow-up.

I sent the tapes out for transcription on a weekly basis. A former secretary transcribed the tapes for me. She is very quick and efficient, and she usually had the tapes back to me within a week. When we met to exchange tapes, she sometimes shared her thoughts on the content of the tapes with me and provided me with a different understanding of some issues. I had confidence that she recognized the confidentiality of the information; however, I did review this with her to be sure. She provided me with the transcriptions both in print form and on a computer disk. Having the transcriptions on disk greatly aided and speeded up my writing of the chapter on the findings in this study.

I read the transcriptions along with my field notes and jotted down my thoughts in the margins. I did this several times, and soon the margins were filled with my notes. This was my first attempt at coding. In instances in which I felt that knowing the emotion attached to the words would help me to gain a better understanding, I listened to the tapes. As well, I reviewed the documents and examined the artifacts.

The intensive and continuous review of all the sources of data allowed me to develop a deep understanding of what had been collected. I then categorized the data into four major categories: philosophy, relationships, practices, and programs and services. Further reflection allowed me to identify themes in each category as well as a metaphor for reflection and discussion of the findings.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

Validity, dependability, and ethics are necessary attributes of all research, particularly qualitative research.

Internal Validity

Internal validity in all research relies on the meaning of reality. Merriam (1998) stated that in case study research,

> internal validity deals with the question of how the research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what was really there? Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring? (p. 201)

What is being observed in qualitative research is "people's constructions of reality" (p. 203). Lecompte and Preissle (1993) identified four factors that increase the validity of ethnographic and case study research: (a) living among the participants and collecting data for long periods, (b) informant interviews, (c) participant observation, and (d) researcher reflection, introspection, and self-monitoring. In addition to these factors, I used member checks and a "holistic understanding of the situation to construct plausible explanations about the phenomena being studied" (Mathison, 1988, p. 17).

All of these factors are present in this study. I spent an extended period of time in the school and maintained my contact with the principal for a long enough period of time that I was confident that I had a good understanding of her perceptions, her actions, and her dilemmas. At the point at which my contact with the participant failed to yield new and different data, I determined that the data I had gathered was trustworthy.

Students, parents, staff, and community members informed my research in the school. I engaged all four groups in informal conversations which were captured in either my field notes or on tape. The taped conversations were transcribed and along with my field notes provided information relative to the leadership of the participant in the school.

I spent an extended period of time in the school setting observing the life experiences of the participant. I engaged in informal and semiformal conversations with the participant, and I endeavored to observe and understand school leadership as those in that setting experienced it.

As the researcher, at every stage in the study I engaged in ongoing reflection, introspection, and self-monitoring. These are habits that I have used in my role of teacher, consultant, and associate superintendent of schools and continue to use as a school principal. I found that reflection, introspection, and self-monitoring are integral parts of my very being, and my ability to use them in this study was effortless.

External Validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situation. It was not the intent of this study that the findings be applicable to other situations; however, it is my hope that readers will be able to gain insights on leadership to create the conditions for enhanced educational opportunities in an elementary school. I prefer to use Firestone's (1993) "case to case" transfer view of external validity in which it is the reader who determines what there is in the study that fits his or her situation. I have provided sufficient rich, thick description in the study to make this possible.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the term *dependability* is a more fitting term than *reliability* for qualitative research. They maintained that "rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable" (p. 288). Merriam (1998) stated that in qualitative case studies, the question is not whether findings will be found again, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. I am confident that I have presented the data and findings in this study in such a way that readers will find them consistent and dependable.

I have left an audit trail of my field notes, my journal, the tapes, and their transcriptions, as well as the artifacts and documents that were used in the study. I have

described the research methodology in enough detail so that those who wish to replicate the study will be able to do so.

Ethics

Ethical Considerations

Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the school district prior to beginning the research, and informed consent was obtained in writing from the participant prior to the start of the study. The participant was informed of the voluntary nature of her involvement and was informed of her right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participant informants were also advised that their participation was entirely voluntary. I found that all of the students, staff, parents, and community members who were approached were open and willing to be involved.

Anonymity and confidentiality relative to the participant and informants was maintained during and following the study.

Pseudonyms have been used both for the participant and for the school.

Information of a sensitive nature was discussed with the participant prior to its inclusion in the study.

The participant and the participant informants were provided with the opportunity to review transcripts of the interviews and to clarify the comments. The participant was also given the right to amend the comments, and together we were able to negotiate the interpretation of the data to ensure its fidelity. The participant was provided with a draft of the findings and the summary of the study.

Ethical Dilemmas

The participant in this study is a well-known educator in the city in which the research was carried out. By describing her actions and the programs and services that are offered to students in her school, there is the potential that the participant may be

identified. I have used pseudonyms for the participant and her school, as well as the participant informants, and I have attempted to provide the information in such a way that anonymity and confidentiality have been protected.

CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

Based on the data that were gathered and analyzed, I have woven together the findings of the study. This chapter begins with my own introduction to the school and presents the historical context of the setting and the respondents. Four major categories follow: philosophy and beliefs, people and relationships, practices, and programs. A section on the principal, Bernice Wonder the person, concludes the chapter.

First Impressions

I began my teaching career in the city center in a school in close proximity to Wildwood School. However, I had only visited Wildwood School once, and that was in the early 1970s. On a warm January morning, I made my first 'official' visit. As I drove down the main street leading into the city center and made a left-hand turn to enter the school parking lot, I was struck with the beauty and solidity of the building with its red brick façade, large windows, and unique bride walk perched atop its roof like a crown. The colorful playground with an abundance of adventurous equipment would let anyone know that the building was a place for young children. The parking lot was filled with cars, and for a brief moment I felt intimidated. However, as I searched for a place to park, I felt a sense of excitement, and I was eager and looking forward to beginning my study.

Historical Context

The Facility

Wildwood School was opened at the turn of the twentieth century by the city of Edmonton and was one of five elementary schools in the public school system. In keeping with the design of buildings of the era, the school is a stately, three-story, red brick building with a majestic roofline. The building has a main door that faces south and can be accessed only by walking through the playground. Mainly students use this door.

Most of the visitors to the school use the rear door, which places the individual in the hallway that connects the main building to the gymnasium.

The school has two sections, the main building and the gymnasium. In the main building there are four levels connected by stairwells, with large windows allowing in plenty of sunlight, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The basement and the main and second floor levels have wide central hallways flanked by large, airy rooms with large windows. The fourth level, originally constructed as space for physical education, has an open area, one large classroom, and several small office-type rooms. Student washrooms are in the basement.

The gymnasium is distinctly different from the main building, and one can discern very easily that it was an add-on. This section was added on about forty years ago, and the gray stucco cladding and flat roof are not in keeping with the architecture or any of the design elements of the main building. The gymnasium is approximately 3000 square feet in area and has an attached kitchen, storage areas, and washrooms.

There is staff and visitor parking at the north and west of the school. A six-foot chain-link fence that surrounds the school provides safety for the students while they are on the playground areas at the front and back of the school, from the heavy traffic that surrounds the school.

History of the School

Wildwood School was one of the first schools built in the city of Edmonton. The student population of the school peaked in 1922 when the enrolment reached 668 students. Over the past 50 years, as the city expanded, suburban areas have been developed and new schools built. The population in the city center has steadily declined, and this has had an impact on lowering the student population at Wildwood School. For the 2000-2001 school year, there were 182 students. There is a teaching staff of seven for the preschool to Grade 6 program. In addition to the teaching staff, there is the principal,

one assistant principal, one administrative assistant, one mentorship program coordinator, four teaching assistants, one custodian, a school nurse, and a family therapist. Student enrolment for the coming school year is expected to remain at 182 students, and it is expected that the staffing will also be maintained at the current level. The projected budget for the school is just under one million dollars.

The school serves students from the immediate community surrounding the school, although a few students reside in other neighborhoods. The homes in the community are old, and many of the homes are rental properties. There is some commercial development such as a drug store, a fast food restaurant, and a wheel alignment shop adjacent to the school. The students come from a limited range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from those who are very poor to those who earn an average income. There are no students who come from well-to-do families. About 65% of the student population is Aboriginal, and the remaining are new immigrants and naturalized Canadians representing a diversity of ethnic groups.

Reputation of the School Before 1995

Prior to September 1995, Wildwood School had a mixed reputation. For some it was positive, but for many it was negative. One of the teachers recalled, "It wasn't a bad school. There were some good things happening here." One of the parents currently at the school made this statement:

> I've lived in this community for many years, and I was always told that Wildwood School is a bad place for kids. There is no discipline, and the kids are always getting into fights. The administration does nothing about this. Don't send your child to the school.

Visitors, too, knew of the less-than-positive reputation of the school. Constance, a regular volunteer at the school, talked about what it was like prior to 1995:

> I volunteered here for five years prior to Bernice's arrival, and needless to say, it was a very different school. The school building was dirty, and the kids were not well behaved. There were very few programs for the kids in the school.

Bernice Wonder's Arrival

In the 10 years prior to Bernice's arrival, Wildwood School had a number of principals. Her predecessor was in the school for seven years prior to retiring from the principalship and teaching. The school was operating as a 'community school' with a charter under the auspices of the provincial Department of Education. The facility was old and in much need of repair, and there was a visible lack of organization and order in the school. In addition, Bernice discovered that the school had a budget deficit of $65,000 when she arrived.

A teacher recalled Bernice's arrival:

> We had known that our principal was retiring, so we knew that we were getting a new principal. When we were told that Bernice was going to be our new principal, we were not quite sure what to expect. We did know that she had worked in an inner-city school and that she had been a successful principal. We also knew that she had a reputation for making changes. I was looking forward to a new principal and the changes. I feel that new principals always bring in new ideas, and that can be positive.

Another teacher added to this picture: "I have been teaching at this school for twelve years, and I was looking forward to working with a new principal. I was not too worried about changes, as I believe change is good."

Several staff members commented on the state of the school on Bernice's arrival: "When Bernice came here, I honestly believe that she could not believe some of the things that went on this school. The school was a mess, and there were all these people around doing very little with students or for students." The reputation of the school was far from ideal.

Bernice's recollection was similar:

> It was not an easy transition to this school. The principal I was replacing had been here for seven years and was heading for retirement. Some of the things that were taking place in the school, the condition of the school facility, the lack of cleanliness in the building, the disorganization of space and materials, and the lack of focus in the school program, stirred up a rage in me, a rage fuelled by the fact that I believed that these children deserved more, if not the best. I could not

understand how the district could allow this to happen for students. That was my beginning at Wildwood School.

Reputation of the School in 2001

Over the past five years things have changed at Wildwood School. The school's reputation has become very positive. A retired principal recalled that parents who would not have considered Wildwood for their son or daughter five years ago are now coming to the school and feeling extremely positive about the school's reputation. The school's population has increased over the past five years, although there continues to be a high transiency rate.

As I arrived for my first visit at Wildwood School, I was amazed to see the number of cars in the parking lot. On my walk to the rear door of the school, adults on their way out and students on their way into the school smiled and said "Hi!" I felt welcome.

Standing in the hallways between the main building and the gym, I could see down the length of the school. The main hallway is up a short flight of stairs and is furnished with several wingback chairs upholstered in a rich burgundy fabric, surrounded by baskets of children's books on the floor. There are framed student art pieces, along with school photographs, on the walls. The student art displays changed regularly throughout my stay at the school. The main office and the staff lounge are located just off the main hallway to the left with classrooms to the right of the hallway. Students and parents waited in the hallways in comfort, taking a few minutes to chat with a teacher or the principal. What a treat to enter a school that looked so friendly and welcoming!

It was a few minutes before the bell signaling the beginning of classes for the day, and Bernice was standing in the hallways greeting students and their parents, commenting on how well each child was doing in school, and complimenting the parents for supporting their children with the work that was sent home. Mentors were also

making their way to the reading room, and Bernice thanked each one of them for their contribution to the students of Wildwood School.

Prior to my arrival at the school, Bernice had informed the school community that I would be working in the school, so when I arrived I was greeted by name by staff and students. I felt welcomed and was eager to learn.

Bernice introduced me to everyone we met as we walked in the hallways and visited the classrooms. Most of the students greeted us as we walked in the hallways and into the classrooms. I could sense that people liked being at Wildwood School and that everyone had a special affection for Bernice. The school did not seem negative in any way.

The staff shared with me that they noticed the difference from earlier years with comments such as, "We have a great reputation now because of Bernice's leadership, and I know that the parents are behind her one hundred percent," "We now have the reputation of being the best school in the city center," and "I think the school has really changed for the better since Bernice has been here." One of the parents echoed the staff: "I think Bernice has done a great job at Wildwood. The school has really improved since she has been here. We owe her a lot."

It sounded easy, but Bernice knew how much needed to be done to change the reputation of the school. Bernice told of going to a principals' meeting and a colleague saying, "What did you do to get assigned to Wildwood?" And when Bernice replied that she had requested the assignment, the colleague continued with, "I hear that Wildwood is a tough school and the kids are badly behaved. Good luck!" It was difficult to convince people that the school has changed.

What Changed?

Although Wildwood School has a student population of 182 students, it has the complexity of a much larger school. Add in the community and other public agency involvement in the school, and the population increases dramatically.

Asked to identify the changes that have made the school a different place from what it was before Bernice Wonder's arrival, it would be easy to respond that she is the one person, on her own, who has made the difference. Most people in the school would agree that Bernice has made a difference. However, with the wide range of programs and activities in the school, most people in the school focused on the differences that they have noticed which have changed their roles, their attitudes, and the nature of leadership in the school. When asked to describe the changes, most people brought the changes to life through their personal experiences.

The word *team* was used commonly at Wildwood. The staff sees Bernice as a team player and indicated that the staff as a group makes most decisions. The staff believes that new staff members are selected partially on the basis of their ability to be team players. The notion of team exists throughout the school. The school nurse sees herself as a team builder too. She commented:

> When I first started here I went around to every one of the classrooms and introduced myself, tried to spend some time with the staff in the staff room, went to a couple of staff meetings, talking about the different kinds of things that I would be open to doing with them.

The focus on teamwork has enhanced the atmosphere in the school for some staff:

> It's kind of neat because I always thought we had teams, but we had teams working in different corners almost pitted against each other. Now we work in triads with different people, and we all work for the common good of the school. Now everyone sits everywhere; everyone chats with each other. It's none of these little groups and such.

Others described the camaraderie of staff, the consensus building that has occurred, the collaboration and cooperation that have developed, and the trust. One

member described the trust that Bernice showed in her ability as a teacher when she took her to a meeting with school principals:

> Bernice and I went to the AISI [Alberta Initiative for School Improvement] project meeting, and I was the only teacher there. The principals were saying all these things about how the program was running in their schools. Bernice told her colleagues that she felt the classroom teacher was the one who could best describe what was happening with the program and asked me to talk to the principals.

Changes in the environment in terms of safety for all in the school have also been noted. "I think Wildwood is a very safe environment for learning and safe physically for our students, our staff, and our parents. It has changed considerably since I first got here." Cleanliness has also improved. A parent who started at the school the year before Bernice arrived said, "When we started here the school was actually a real mess."

Some of the most significant changes have been those related to the learning environment. The staff commented on the fewer number of student absences, the instructional focus on literacy, accessibility to resources and professional development, improved learning conditions, and the provision of support services for students and their families as well as staff.

One teacher commented on the past malaise of students missing a lot of school.

> Bernice is pretty tough on the parents, and she understands that they have many difficulties. But she tells the parents that they have to send their children to school. She has even made house visits, gotten children out of their beds, dressed them, and dragged them to school. I think the parents now know she is serious about the children attending regularly.

The focus is now on literacy and success for each child, and students and their parents recognize that they are active participants in achieving that success.

The relationships that have existed between Bernice and the staff have been consistent, fair, and developed with a strong sense of integrity. "I have been at other schools where the principal plays favorites. That's not the case here," was a common message.

Bernice's approach to working with staff, students, and parents is direct. One of the teachers indicated, "I know that if she had a problem with any one of us, she would let us know. I would not hear it from someone else." Another commented:

> There are times when she sees something that she wants you to change, and she lets you know. It's never done vindictively. There are times when I grit my teeth, but then I look at it and go, . . . "She's right, it does look better."

An openness has been created at Wildwood School. The staff, students, and parents know that Bernice would always make time for them. This openness is also extended to visitors to the school—student teachers, visiting educators from other school districts in Canada and across the world, a parent shopping for a school, or a member of the public wanting to know more about the school and public education. One of the parents, dissatisfied with the schooling for her children in the other school system in the community, commented on Bernice's openness during a visit to the school prior to making the decision to enroll her children:

> I was walking through the school to see what it was like when I went into the gym. I saw this woman sitting on the floor reading a book to a youngster. The woman looked over to me and said, "Come on in. Can I help you?" When I said I was trying to decide on whether I should bring my children to the school, she asked me to wait for a few minutes so she could finish reading to the child, following which she took time to welcome me to the school and told me that she would love to have my children at Wildwood School. Only then did I realize that she was the principal. I made up my mind without much trouble.

Several other parents commented on her openness: "I can go to Bernice with any problem," "She will help you with problems that you are having with your child or in the family," and "She can get you help if you need it."

Bernice has made it a priority to be available to students. When a student wants to see her and she has a prior commitment, she ensures that the student knows that she is busy and sets up a time to meet later in the day. Much of her time in the school is spent talking with students.

Another comment that was frequently made was how supportive Bernice is of all the programs that help students to experience success. One staff member acknowledged Bernice's belief in what physical activity does for student learning and told of how Bernice showed her support:

> My class is involved in the Breakfast Club. We start each morning before classes walking or running, following which we make a breakfast together. We take eight minutes out of the instructional day to make the breakfast. I had to justify the time, but when I told Bernice of the goal setting by the students and their involvement in making the breakfast, she was very supportive.

The coach of the cheerleading team echoed a similar feeling:

> Bernice just wants the kids to be successful, and cheerleading gives them another way to feel good about themselves. She always tells the kids that she is so proud of their performances, and she asks them how they feel, what they feel they did best, and what they feel they need to work on.

As well, countless staff, students, parents, and other individuals involved with the school spoke about Bernice's visibility. An in-school mentor commented:

> Whenever I come to the school, she's always talking to the kids in the hallways or in her office. I think she's very approachable. When I went to school, the principal stayed in the office, and we did not get to talk to her. Actually, we were afraid of the principal. It is not like that with Bernice. I see students coming up to her and hugging her.

This visibility has allowed Bernice to lead through modeling. The staff has been motivated by the example that she sets. A staff member recognized this modeling: "When she walks through the school and if she sees a piece of paper on the floor, she picks it up. I have not seen other principals do that. I now find myself following her example." I noticed on our daily tours that as she picked up things, students and visitors followed her example.

Are these the things that have made the difference at Wildwood School over the past five years? Are these anecdotes illustrative of the vision and a plan, a plan in the

mind of the principal that has moved Wildwood School along the road to ensuring success for each child?

Philosophy and Beliefs

Bernice Wonder, the elementary school principal, is a multifaceted individual. Observing her at Wildwood School over an extended period of time. I was struck by how effortless her leadership appeared. I soon became aware that this simplicity was not a result of having few issues to deal with, but rather the result of a complex interplay of her many skills and understandings. Her experience in working with a wide variety of organizations, her experience in teaching teachers, and her more recent elementary school administrative experience have enabled her to become unconsciously skilled. To many it looks easy. Her philosophy and her orientation to people are reflected in the practices and programs which have helped to ensure success for each student and have also led to the success of the school as a whole.

The philosophy and beliefs that Bernice holds have several dimensions. She has strong views about the value of learning and schooling; she has high standards and expectations, and she values goal setting. She has required each staff member to set professional and personal goals for each year. Her beliefs about leadership are clear, and her concern for safety and well-being are central to her philosophy. She is optimistic and positive in her approach to life, and she is committed to being accessible and visible. Staff, students, and parents have understood her vision for Wildwood School, clear in its premises and complex in its demands.

Beliefs About Learning and Schooling

Bernice's beliefs and her philosophy about students, learning, and schooling are two of the major factors that have had an impact on the climate and tone of Wildwood School. Everyone whom she has met in the context of Wildwood School knows about her beliefs and philosophy, and they soon learn about what the school represents. Bernice

believes that "we must give the kids the absolute best, surround them with the best teachers and the best resources, and do the best everyday to help them grow in regards to their academics as well as their behavior." She also believes that "when you expect nothing, you get nothing, and that it is our job as teachers to continue to raise the bar."

She shares her beliefs with parents, students, and community members at the many parent evenings that are held at the school. Visitors from within the district and from other school jurisdictions in other cities and other provinces and countries have heard about Bernice Wonder and Wildwood School, and there are regular calls requesting that Bernice share her understandings and beliefs in another setting or to a group in her school.

Her beliefs and philosophy are public knowledge, and the staff is clear on what Bernice represents and what she will support. Hence, no one has been discouraged from trying something new, because they know in advance what fits her philosophy and the philosophy of the school. Bernice has supported the staff with many of the initiatives in the school because she is confident that the staff knows the way they operate in the school. One of the teachers saw her support in this way: "When visitors come to the school and they ask me about what is going on, I know that we all say the same thing. She trusts us to do the right thing."

The staff has been clear about the beliefs that are held. The school nurse explained:

> Bernice's communication with everyone in the school is very effective. She makes us aware of what's happening through the daily memo, through e-mail messages, through meetings. Everyone is informed of what we are working towards. We are all working towards the same goal, and we are all aware of what we are doing.

What does Bernice Wonder believe? Students come first; every student can be successful regardless of his or her socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, gender, or

ability; and any decision that is made in the school must pass the test that it contributes to the learning and success of students.

Central to the school's philosophy are the two core values—literacy and respect. The value of literacy is displayed in Bernice's message in the Parent Handbook:

> Welcome to another exciting year of learning at our school. You have chosen to send your child to a school with a strong focus on academic achievement. What does that mean? That means we will work hard, as a school family, to help your child become a competent reader and writer. Kids who read **SUCCEED** and we want your child to build a strong foundation so that they will be successful in life. (p. 1)

One instance in which this philosophy was displayed further was in one of the school newsletters in an article congratulating one of the teachers on being recognized by the Board of Trustees:

> The bright light was our very own Mrs. Sands who has taught our full day kindergarten for the past three years. She was recognized for her attitude, her courage to try new things and the trust she builds with other professionals in doing what is always best for kids.

This philosophy is woven through all the messages in every issue of the *Wildwood News*, the schools' monthly newsletter, and in everything that happens in the school.

In describing Bernice's beliefs, the staff used statements such as, "She has the interests of everybody in the place at hand, kids and staff" and "To her, kids come first." She says over and over, "We want to do what's best for each student," and she asks "How are you going to become more effective in meeting the needs of students?" and "The bottom line is always kids." Each student who interacted with Bernice was greeted warmly and welcomed to share his or her thoughts and feelings with her, whether it was in the hallways, in her office, in the classroom, in the lunchroom, or on the playground. Students know that Ms. Bernice will have time for them and that they matter at Wildwood School.

She demonstrated that belief when she arrived at Wildwood School almost five years ago. She decided to have a system of positive referrals for students and to have regular assemblies—one for each division level, practices that she has continued. With the positive referrals, an adult in the school can make a positive referral about any student. These referrals are placed in a box in the office, and once each day Bernice makes an announcement over the public address system congratulating each student for his or her accomplishment in either academic work or behavior. The students then get to come to her office and receive a token from the 'goody box" for positive behavior, or they get a book if they are being recognized for their academic work. At the assemblies, students from each class receive recognition for their contributions in their classrooms. Through these activities, Bernice gets to see each student and develops a good knowledge of each individual in the school. If she does not see a student with a positive referral or one being recognized in the assembly, she quickly follows up with the classroom teacher. Bernice said that it has been wonderful to see the growth and the successes that have taken place for these students. All of this contributes to the core value of respect.

Bernice and the staff at Wildwood believe that learning is important for all students. To emphasize the focus on learning, an objective in Wildwood School's three-year plan is, "All staff demonstrate responsibility for the provision or support of appropriate and challenging learning experiences for students." Included in the plan to achieve this objective are a strong literacy base, ongoing staff development, delivery of programs to support learning, learning support for students experiencing difficulty, involvement of students in self-evaluation with teacher support so that they develop the ability to access their goals and set goals for further learning, and communication with parents about learning expectations.

This learning focus is not new. For the past five years, Bernice has reinforced this with students and their parents every chance that she gets. She reminds them continuously "everything in the school points to the fact that we are here for you to learn,

and everything we do is in support of that." When she closed the community schoolroom, she pointed out to parents that it was closed because it was not assisting students with their learning. "Having adults sitting around drinking coffee and chatting all day did not help students." Parents recognized the basis for her decision and have accepted it.

Another spin-off from the focus on learning has been Bernice's rejection of the Adaptation Program. This program offered remedial programming in a segregated setting to those students who were not experiencing success in school. When Bernice arrived at Wildwood School, there were three classes making up the program. Bernice's concerns were that many of the students in these classes had specific and widely varying learning needs that were not being met. Furthermore, the program was not serving students from the community; rather, it was serving students from communities ranging from the far north to the far south in the city. Few of the students in the program lived in the community. Bernice believed that students were placed in the program for a wide range of reasons, creating an environment that was not conducive to learning. Students attending the program have returned to their home schools, and those students resident in Wildwood's boundaries have been accommodated in the regular program. Bernice has indicated that the students are doing well in relation to their behavior in the regular program, but they continue to struggle with their academic work.

Bernice spoke with passion about some of the students in the Adaptation Program:

> We have had some kids who were in the program who have done well after joining the regular program. If they had remained in the Adaptation Program, they most probably would not have had positive role models and in all likelihood would not have been successful in school.

The Mission Statement, developed after Bernice came to Wildwood, has added another dimension—individual learning. It states, "At Wildwood School, in an atmosphere of support, respect, collaboration and challenge, we are committed to

establishing caring relationships, which facilitate, accelerate, and celebrate each individual's learning journey."

Balanced with the notion of the celebration of each individual's learning journey is the notion of success through literacy. A sign at the corner of the schoolyard reads, "Kids who read, Succeed." This is tied to Bernice's belief that kids who are competent readers and writers will have a strong foundation for future success in life.

Wildwood School has existed so that students will have the opportunity to be successful in school. One parent stated clearly, "If you want the kids to be successful in school, then put structures in place to help each student be successful."

One strategy that has been tried over the past few years and has been particularly successful in reinforcing the importance of reading to achieve success is the Home Reading program. The Home Reading program requires students to read for at least 15 minutes each night. The school sends a package home for the student to read, and it is the parents' job to make sure the child reads it either alone or to a family member. Parents are asked to provide a signature telling the school that the child has completed the reading task. The importance of the Home Reading program is constantly being reinforced and celebrated in school and classroom newsletters and through recognition programs in the school. Most of the students in the school are actively involved with home reading. For the few who participate sporadically, Bernice usually gives the parents a call to impress upon them the importance of reading. Bernice often does a spot check of knapsacks as students leave the school at the end of the day to ensure that they contain the home reading package. If it is not there, she sends students back to their classrooms to get it. She also reminds students on a daily basis about the importance of reading.

Many support systems, including teachers, teaching assistants, mentors, health care workers, the school's family therapist, and other community workers have also been there to assist students and their families. "If you need help, you will get it" is practiced at Wildwood School. Bernice believes that everyone needs a support system. Staff

members are encouraged to seek support, if they need it, from consultants and other professionals. She models the importance of support by effectively using services available from the school district as well as other agencies, keeping in close contact with her principal colleagues, and attending principal support meetings on a regular basis.

When one of the teachers was asked what is different since Bernice came to the school, she responded, "She really gets us to think about how we are meeting the needs of kids. All kids. She has helped us to become more reflective; more effective, and better teachers."

Bernice has ensured that a wide range of programs is available at Wildwood to meet the needs of the students. Each of these programs is aimed at giving students challenging and successful experiences in school. She has embraced the Literacy Based In-School Mentoring program as well as the Balanced Literacy program and envisions Wildwood as a literacy-based mentoring showcase for the district. "If kids can read and write and they know that at least one person in their life really cares about them, they are bound to be successful."

A comprehensive support system has existed in the school, and Bernice reminds everyone of this regularly. The classroom teachers, the teaching assistants, the support staff, the mentors, the family therapist, the school nurse, the custodian, the police resource officer, and the lunchroom supervisors have all seen their role as helping students to be successful. She spoke of one student who had tremendous difficulty with his behavior in another school and was placed in the Behavior Assistance program. Since coming to Wildwood School he has been integrated into the regular program and has become a responsible and diligent student, due in large part to the support from his classroom teacher and his mentor.

As well, Wildwood has been dedicated to programming appropriately for the wide range of student needs in the school, whether it has been those with special needs, those from particular cultures, or those living under difficult circumstances. Bernice constantly

monitors whether the support is there and whether additional support needs to be accessed. She accesses support for the academic program and also for the social and emotional development of students. She has welcomed many individuals and groups into the school when she sees that they may be able to support the students academically or socially and emotionally. When student nurses arrived at the school, they were welcomed, encouraged to be visible and involved in the school, and offered open access to the school.

The focus on the student has been reflected in the expectations for the teachers. This is communicated very clearly at the first staff meeting of the year. Teachers are expected to know their students and to provide a program to meet each student's needs, and they are to communicate regularly with the parents or guardians about the child's learning. On a daily basis, all teachers except those who have supervision duties on that day are expected to be present in the lunchroom for 10 minutes while the children eat their lunch. In addition, each staff member is expected to provide at least one extracurricular activity in the way of a club for students. This provides all the instructional staff members with another opportunity to get to know individual students better. The staff indicated that they see the value in doing this because it also gives students an opportunity to get to know them. Bernice maintained that it has been excellent for collegiality, as well as being a means to achieving greater consistency and fairness for students throughout the school.

Bernice also sees herself as a learner. She remarked, "I am constantly learning. I learn from things that sometimes don't go very well." She reflects on her practice and makes a mental note of what worked and what did not. She indicated that she is getting better with her practice and is able to predict what might happen, earlier.

Bernice usually reflects at the end of the day. She connects with individual staff members about specific issues by e-mail from home in the evening, and staff has indicated that they can get several e-mail messages from her when they open their mail in

the morning. She also prepares the daily memo that informs staff of the happenings for the day in the school.

Everyone learns at Wildwood School.

Standards, Expectations, and Goals

Standards have been high at Wildwood School. Everyone in the building has set goals for the year. Bernice has set goals and has shared these with her superintendent. She has also shared these goals with her staff. She has had all her staff, including the support and custodial staff, set both professional and personal goals for themselves, and she asks them to identify the indicators for each goals. She believes that the goals should be achievable and measurable. She is confident that the staff knows her style and her expectations. Bernice meets with each staff member at the beginning of the school year to review the goals, and once every three years the staff member gets a written performance appraisal. During the year Bernice monitors how the staff are doing with their goals through informal chats and discussions. Occasionally, when she notices that a staff member may not be working towards achieving the goals that have been set, Bernice has a more formal talk with the staff member. One teacher commented, "In reviewing the goals, she is really getting us to think about how we are meeting the needs of the kids and whether we are doing all that we can to meet the needs of the kids."

Teachers have used a similar process with their students. Students from their first days in school are encouraged to set goals, albeit for the short term. Students have set goals such as "Being kind to Suong in our class," or "Making sure I get to the next Good Behavior Day," or "I want to read every night this week." Teachers indicated delight in the students' ability to set goals. Bernice always asks the students about their goals and provides them with support in the way of a verbal hug, which assists the students to keep working towards their goals. One student commented, "She is always asking if we have set any goals. If we say yes, she says, 'Good for you. Keeping working on those goals.'"

Bernice also asks students questions about their long-term goals. I observed her on many occasions asking students what they planned to do when they finished high school. If they hesitated, she would prompt them by asking them if they planned to go to college or university, and it was amazing to see some very young students tell her that their long-term goal was to go to college or university.

Not only does Bernice discuss these goals with staff and students, but it has also become a topic of conversation with parents as well. Bernice believes that the parents need to know that their children set goals, because it will inform the parents as to what help they can give their children. When parents were asked during a review of the school plan what the school should continue doing, one thing they said was "continue with student goal setting." She believes that parents may do well to set goals for themselves in regard to their children. The school's family therapist has given a talk to parents on goal setting and making changes. The message that is consistently given to all is, "It is hard work to change, but be assured we can do whatever we put our mind to."

Behavior expectations have been clear at Wildwood School. The school behavior plan is based on the understanding that a certain level of order is necessary if the school is to function and students are to learn. It recognizes that all students are constantly making choices about whether they will contribute positively or negatively to any given situation. The behavior plan reflects the belief that students can and will make good choices if they are allowed the opportunity to decide, given the positive support they need, and held accountable for the decisions that they make. The school rules are few and are stated positively:

1. Students shall choose to keep their hands and feet to themselves.
2. Students shall choose to keep mean comments to themselves.
3. Students shall choose to do what an adult asks them to do the first time.
4. Students shall choose to bring pride to Wildwood School.

Bernice expects that all the adults in Wildwood School will be guided by the same code of conduct. A statement in the Parent Handbook reads, "We, as a staff, not only teach, but have the responsibility to serve as **STRONG** role models. We know that our actions speak louder than our words."

Bernice and the staff recognize appropriate behavior and growth through several activities. Lunch with the principal or a staff member, positive notes, positive phone calls to the parents, class awards, positive weekly referrals to the principal, and selection as student helpers are some of the positive consequences of demonstrating appropriate behavior.

Bernice has high expectations for the students, and she is confident that they can meet them. Each classroom develops classroom rules, which set the expectations for behavior in the classroom. These rules are posted. In addition, the rule along with the school rules is communicated to parents in the first classroom newsletter each year. Students are guided to learn pro-social strategies to replace inappropriate behaviors. They are engaged in active decision making by being asked to identify the problem, identify the possible solutions, choose one of the possible solutions, and reflect on how they will solve the problem the next time.

There are some students who have difficulty setting goals or meeting expectations. For these students, Bernice has used 'time outs.' She explained:

> For those kids that have trouble doing their work or behaving appropriately, we give them time to reflect on their behavior. We have three time-out rooms in the office area. Students are asked to spend some time in there and either finish their work or think about how they must behave in future. Students do not like being in time-out.

Bernice indicated that very few students return to spend time in the time-out rooms. For the few who return regularly, she usually calls for a meeting with the parents so that the school and the home can work on addressing the problem jointly.

Bernice prefers to deal with students who are having difficulty meeting expectations on a one-on-one basis. I observed her dealing with a ten-year-old boy who was swearing at one of the girls on the playground. She called the boy into the office and first expressed her disappointment for his inappropriate behavior. She then told him that she wanted to help him. She asked him to write down all the swear words that he knew, each one on a separate piece of paper. The youngster looked at her in disbelief, but he complied. She then asked him to say each word and then to crumple it up and throw it in the garbage. With tears streaming down his face, the youngster managed to say all the words and throw all the pieces of paper in the garbage. Bernice then told him that since he had disposed of the words, she expected that they were no longer part of his vocabulary. I believe the youngster learned a valuable lesson. Bernice commented further:

> When a student chooses to make an inappropriate choice, we persevere to act in the best interests of the student and our whole school family. Each student and each situation is different. We try to match the inappropriate behavior with an appropriate level of assertiveness.

Bernice has communicated to parents that the school family and the parent family share the responsibility for teaching appropriate behavior. She reminds parents, "between birth and age eighteen, children spend approximately nine percent of their time in school, so the home family is an essential element in coaching children to make good choices."

Attendance standards have been in place as well. Bernice believes that over the years educators have felt that it was not their prerogative to demand regular attendance from students. Bernice has been very assertive in establishing attendance standards at Wildwood School. Attendance standards have been set at 97% for each classroom, and this target is monitored on a regular basis. Phone calls are made to the home at the beginning of the school day and again after lunch if a student is not in school. Bernice has also gone to the home or sent one of the staff members to the home of a student who

shows signs of not attending regularly. Some parents have not been happy with Bernice's actions in this regard, but she is not willing to compromise on this issue. She believes that it is difficult for young students to learn if they are not in class. She commented:

> The teaching-learning process builds upon itself. Each lesson presented to students is based upon or related to the lessons that were taught earlier. Just as we can never regain a moment of time wasted, the child who misses a day of school also misses a day of education that cannot be retrieved. Research has shown us that those children who attend school regularly are more likely to be successful during their school years.

If poor attendance becomes a problem, the social worker assigned to the school becomes involved with the family to provide assistance. Classrooms that achieve the 97% standard for attendance are recognized at the monthly assembly, and the name of one student is drawn for a special reward. This reward is a computer that can be taken home. The school's network operator goes to the home and installs the computer for the family.

Bernice has set standards not only with respect to performance and behavior, but also with respect to service. The standard for dealing with issues and responding to calls has been within 24 hours. Mail has been dealt with on a daily basis, and any issues that have not been resolved in a day are acknowledged within the day. Bernice has also set a standard for the resolution of issues with staff, and the staff frequently refers to the rule of 12-24. This rule encourages individuals to think about any concern that they may have for 12 hours. If it is still a concern after 12 hours, they are asked to make a commitment to finding the answer within 24 hours. If unable to do so, they are encouraged to drop it and move on. One staff member commented, "This has contributed positively to the sense of family in the school."

All issues in the school, whether with a student, a parent, or a staff member, are dealt with immediately. Bernice believes that the best way to deal with people and issues is to handle things right away; everyone now knows this to be the standard. The administrative assistant said that it helps in that "you don't lose any sleep over things if

you address them right away." This timely attention to resolving issues has helped staff to recognize that the next time there is a problem, she will meet with the individual involved and provide support to resolve the problem. Staff members know that her support can be accessed before the problem erupts.

Bernice's high standards are well known. One staff member who had worked with Bernice in another school had left because she felt that she was unable to meet the high standards. She has since returned to work with Bernice and commented, "It's stressful, but I would rather work with her than someone who does not have high standards." Other staff members indicated that they are comfortable working with her because they know what she stands for and what she will accept and what she will not. From my observations, everyone in the school works to meet the standards set, and little criticism if any was stated.

Leadership

After spending an extended period in Wildwood School, I realized how much of the school reflects the influence of Bernice Wonder. To consider leadership only as what the principal says and does would be to miss much about leadership in the school. It is clear that over the past five years Bernice has influenced all aspects of the school with her leadership. Due to her open philosophy, everyone in the school community has understood what the school represents, and Bernice has not had to be part of every situation to have her presence felt.

It is intriguing that all staff members have understood so clearly in what direction the school is going. Some staff members have attributed Bernice's outstanding leadership to her teaching ability as well as her expansive reading. Comments such as "I know that some of what she talks to us about she's read or learned through leadership seminars or in-services downtown. I think she is a very rounded leader who is extremely skilled," and

"You can tell she's always thinking; she certainly lets us know what she feels is important in education" were shared frequently.

The staff has felt that they have had genuine involvement in the decisions that have affected them. In one instance, when the assistant principal was taken ill and Bernice was informed that he would not be returning for the remainder of the school year, she went to the staff to seek their advice on whether they wanted to replace the assistant principal. The assistant principal also team-taught a Grade 6 class, and Bernice let the teaching partner decide what would happen to replace the assistant principal. The teacher decided that she would prefer to have a teaching assistant work with her for the reminder of the year. Bernice accepted this input from the teacher and provided her with a teaching assistant for her class. She also did not fill the assistant principal vacancy. Instead, she asked two teachers to take on some of the responsibilities, and she provided them with support in the form of release time to carry out the additional tasks.

Every Thursday afternoon the school dismisses at 2:15 p.m., and two hours are set aside for staff meetings where issues are discussed, reading and tasks are distributed, and plans for the upcoming week are reviewed. Bernice provides a detailed agenda for the meetings and intersperses motivational sayings through the agenda items. The staff have indicated that they find the sayings quite "uplifting and motivational." What was remarkable to me about the meetings was that although the time was limited, Bernice always found time to recognize staff members individually for their contributions to the success of students in the school. She gives each staff member a children's book, and she finds time to write an inscription on the inside cover. Although I was an observer and researcher in the school, I was a recipient of a book at one of these meetings. I can tell you that I felt appreciated and truly a part of the Wildwood School family.

Bernice has assigned each staff member to a 'triad,' which is a cross-graded, cross-disciplinary grouping of staff members, and each group has more than the three members that the name might suggest. She often asks the triads to discuss an issue or idea

and bring their feedback to the weekly meeting. When a visiting group of educators raised the issue of whether the school was addressing the top 3% to 5% of the students in each class, Bernice asked the triads to discuss the issue and bring their ideas back to the next meeting. She used the same strategy to get input prior to establishing an instructional focus for the upcoming school year. Staff members have indicated that they feel satisfied with this means to securing their involvement in the decisions that affect them.

Over the past year, Bernice has been working with seven principal colleagues on a project designed to look at a different way of providing services to children in the city center. If the project is implemented, it will have a significant impact on the staff at Wildwood School, as well as the other seven schools. Bernice has kept the staff informed of developments with the project, has sought the staff's input at key points along the way, and has been willing to listen to the staff's concerns and answer their questions. One of the teachers explained:

> When we went to a meeting of all the schools that were going to be involved in the City Center project, it was very obvious that many school staffs had very little knowledge of what was going on. I felt quite good that I knew so much about the project, and I felt very comfortable with the whole thing.

Bernice also has meetings of parents and meetings of community members to get them involved in setting the school plan. She keeps the process simple and asks the participants to work in groups and to identify what the school is doing well and any new things that they would like to see in the school. Parents have indicated that they are satisfied with the process and that they are pleased to see that the school has used their input in making changes in the programming for their children. Bernice commented on how the school has included an idea that came out of one of these sessions:

> At one of the meetings with the community, one of the participants raised a concern about the personal hygiene of our students. This was the catalyst for the Looking Good club. This club now provides information and support to students with their personal hygiene and is quite popular with our students.

Although Bernice has formally identified leadership positions in the school, she encourages everyone to take a leadership role, so much so that individual staff members take leadership for many of the things that are offered to students in the school. On one day the whole school was going off to a performance at a local theatre, and the music teacher was the one who had made the contacts, secured the tickets, and made the arrangements for the transportation for the performance—all at no cost to the students! Another instance was when the network operator had received information that the local office of the Worker's Compensation Board was disposing of large quantities of first grade printing stock. He immediately saw that the paper could be used for many student projects in the school. He drove to the office, loaded up the paper, and took it to the school. Many of the staff assisted in getting the paper into the art storage room, and the school now has an expansive and abundant supply of paper for a variety of student projects. Bernice also believes that by having staff take on a variety of leadership roles in the school, she will be able to identify those individuals who have the potential to be future school administrators and to be a mentor to them if the principalship is a career goal.

Any of the staff that have been hired at Wildwood School have to be philosophically in tune with Bernice's philosophy and that of the school. The process that Bernice uses is a fascinating one. She allows a committee of incumbent staff members to select the new members of the staff. Bernice also meets with each applicant, and her questions are aimed at finding out whether the applicant is someone who can work collaboratively. For staff whose beliefs and values are not philosophically aligned with those of the school, she has encouraged them to transfer to another school, and in one case she has insisted that the staff member retire from teaching. Staff members who subscribe to the philosophy of the school soon find that they are given freedom and responsibility to be professionals within the boundaries, and a sense of trust prevails. One teacher commented on this freedom and trust for her programming for students:

> Previously there was much more of the daily accounting for what you're doing in the classroom and needing more of an explanation of why you want something or why you're going to a particular place or why you're doing a particular program. Now it's more like there's a greater level of trust—trust that whatever you're doing with kids, you're going to cover curriculum, you're going to bring out the best in kids and stretch them to grow and learn. I don't have to explain as much.

Another teacher expressed the same sentiment:

> Bernice believes that, being the teacher in the classroom, you know best what it is you need to learn more about or to involve yourself with. She's very supportive in that way. She always says, "You know what you need, you know what's best." She stands behind us.

Another dimension of leadership is the principal's responsibility to be the instructional leader in the school. Bernice's view of instructional leadership is guided by the fact that she views teachers as professionals who will learn and grow. She maintained, "What teachers need is my support to do the best job in the classroom. If this means professional development or resources or support, I will get this for them." Bernice has committed to getting resources for teachers so that they can teach. One teacher described the access that she now has to resources:

> Our school never seemed to have money. It is really important to teachers to have books and resources. When Bernice arrived at this school, she seemed to make things available. All of a sudden we were allowed to ask for things. It was encouraged, and they started showing up. We had books for different subjects, and the library became new and improved. There was all sorts of money for professional development.

Bernice is also committed to professional development for her staff, and they know that it is an expectation that they engage in ongoing professional development. Her view is "Professional development is so important for teacher growth."

One teacher commented on Bernice's support:

> Isn't it nice to be encouraged to go and your time is covered? Bernice has never said no to an in-service to me. She wants us to go to in-services; she makes time and people available so that we can head off. She doesn't say that you can only go to four or five sessions. I can go to twenty-five if I want in a year. She has been very realistic and very supportive in that sense.

Another staff member described Bernice's monitoring of staff professional development:

> Coming to the school, she tells you that you'd be expected to show growth and that you're expected to do professional development. She's right on you. If you're not doing any professional development, she's asking you why not? If you're doing professional development, she's asking you why and what are you doing with what you learned?

This year several of the teachers are involved in professional development related to the Balanced Literacy program. Bernice has supported this, so that the program can be implemented consistently throughout the school. The Grade 6 teacher is not attending the in-servicing, as she will be retiring at the end of this school year. Bernice encourages everyone to attend workshops and seminars and all staff, including the support and custodial staff, participate actively in professional development activities.

Bernice's experience and expertise with the Effective Teaching program have given her a level of confidence to supervise the instructional program in the school. She knows what makes teaching effective, and she is able to provide teachers with guidance and support to improve instruction.

Another dimension of her instructional leadership is her close connection with the faculty of education at two universities in the city. She has invited researchers from both universities into the school to carry out research projects, as it is her belief that this can only help to strengthen the programming that the school offers to its students. She also believes that this can help the universities stay connected with the field. Research on the literacy-based preschool program, the literacy-based mentorship program, full-day kindergarten, small class size in Grade 1, and the reading habits of older elementary school students are currently underway in the school. In some instances teachers participating in the research projects have been able to get university credit for their involvement. Bernice also welcomes student teachers into the school and views this as an important role for her school to play in the preparation of future teachers, especially for

those student teachers who may plan to work in schools located in the center of large cities.

Bernice tries to visit each classroom daily. Her visits are brief and often involve spending only a few minutes in each room either looking at student work or talking with a student about his or her learning. The only exceptions are first-year teachers. For these teachers Bernice does formal observations of their teaching and meets with them on a regular basis to give them feedback on their teaching performance. If during her class visits she observes something that appears pedagogically unsound, she meets with the teacher to discuss what she has observed and to make suggestions for improved practice.

Responsibility and independence with their achievement and behavior are goals for students as well, and many supports have been put in place to help them achieve these. One of the staff members runs the Homework Club. This club meets after school one day a week, and students who are having difficulty completing their work at home can finish their homework in school. Many teachers are also willing to stay after school to work with students on their homework.

The school has established a C team—a group of students who have been trained to be the first level of intervention in resolving conflict amongst students. Students have to make application for membership on the team and are trained to assume this role by the school's family therapist. The team's services are used on almost a daily basis. Another instance in which students have taken on responsibility is the Student First Aid team. These team members have been trained to provide basic first aid for scrapes and bruises out on the playground at recess breaks. They have also been trained to know when an injury might be serious and that it should be reported to an adult supervisor. I observed students taking on these responsibilities with enthusiasm and serious commitment.

Safety and Wellness

The environment at Wildwood School is warm, safe, and comfortable for learning. Work to create this environment has been going. Although the school has only 182 students, there are an additional 200 or so adults who are in the building weekly with the potential to threaten the safety and security of the students and staff.

Standards are high at Wildwood School, and students are expected to make good choices and behave responsibly. If any of the four school rules have been violated, the consequences have been meted out consistently. Over the past five years, the staff indicated that the students have developed a greater sense of responsibility and have become part of solving problems in the school.

Having a police resource officer attached to the school has enhanced the safety of the school. He is a support and a resource for Bernice, the staff, the students, and the parents. When Bernice anticipates a problem with a family, she contacts the policeman for information and advice. The staff have had the police officer come in with the DARE program, an international program aimed at alerting young people to the dangers of drugs. The policeman has also been a mentor for a student in the school, and the parents have used him as a resource. When parents formed a committee to look into what could be done to rid the area around the school of activities related to drugs and prostitution, he provided them with advice on how to handle the problem and the course of action they should take. Everyone has seen the role of the police officer in a positive light, and Bernice believes that he helps to support the message that the police service is very much a part of the community working to meet the needs of its children who are in school.

Bernice believes that the increased visibility of staff in the school has contributed to the increased safety in the school. Staff is on supervision before school and during the lunch breaks. All staff supervises during the lunch hour, and one can always find an adult in the hallways if one needs help. Bernice is part of the increased supervision, and her

visibility is noticed throughout the school. She believes that this gives the students the message that their teachers care about them.

Students have also taken an active part in keeping the school safe by adhering to the school rules and by demonstrating responsibility by participating on the C team and the First Aid team and by being helpers throughout the school.

In spite of all these efforts, Bernice says that there have been a couple of instances in which the school was not 100% safe:

> We had some student teachers in the school. They had left their backpacks with all of their university books and their wallets in the hallway, and by the time we had returned from touring the school, the backpacks were gone. I now ask all visitors to keep their purses and valuables with them at all times or to lock them in the trunk of their car.
>
> Another instance of the school not being perfectly safe was during a family evening in the gym. As is the custom at the school, everyone removes muddy or wet footwear before entering the gym, and several parents had removed their shoes and left them at the door. Someone took a brand new pair of expensive running shoes belonging to one of our parents that night.

These types of events sadden Bernice, but she continues to provide everyone with her assurance that the school is a safe place to be.

The wellness of the students and staff has also been a priority with Bernice, and many supports have been put in place. A healthy lifestyle and an enjoyment of the job are important ingredients. Bernice keeps her eyes and ears open to what is happening with staff, and she monitors their absences from school. She sends staff members home if they are not looking well or are emotionally drained. She told a staff member to "take a day off" when she noticed the individual was emotionally drained following the sui[illegible] of a close family friend. During report card time staff members are very busy, and [illegible]ne handle this busyness better than others. One staff member spoke of how Bernice helped her through this busy time:

> It was around report card time. I hadn't been well, and I had a very abrasive relative who had come to stay with us. I was having a hard time getting my report

> cards done, and having this individual in the house was not helping me to focus at all. Bernice just said, "Go home and don't worry about it." You don't even have to ask; she just anticipates.

Another staff member recalled Bernice's support when she was feeling overwhelmed:

> Last year during a one-on-one meeting with Bernice, I did tell her that I felt my family was starting to suffer because I was spending long hours at school. She said, "Well, then you need to spend more time with your family." She encouraged me to make it a personal goal. I know that she supports me because she believes that a mentally healthy staff is going to be more effective and do better work.

Bernice was almost evangelical when she talked about achieving balance in one's life. Everyone on her staff said that this is one thing that she does not model well. She puts in extremely long hours at the school, and even when she is away from school she is usually involved with something that relates to the school. The staff see her as "working extremely hard," and I often heard comments such as, "I don't know how she does it," "She's an amazing woman," and "I'm not half as tired as she is, and she doesn't talk about it."

Being appreciated for the work that they do contributes greatly to the wellness of the staff. Bernice is masterful at recognizing the contribution of each staff member, and she does this with hundreds of personalized notes, small tokens of appreciation, and public recognition for their efforts. One staff member talked about it this way:

> She really makes you feel valued as a staff member. The hundreds of cards that she seems to find time to write, and there's always a very personal message, so you know it is not empty. You know she's taken time to sit down and think about it. When she brings people around she speaks very highly of you. She always tells people that I am in the top one percent of teachers!

Another teacher commented on how Bernice has made her feel valued:

> One of the ways that I find I can relax is to take a hot bath when I get home. Bernice often gives me things that I can put in the bath—things like candles and bath oil with the notes thanking me for doing something. She notices the little things.

Bernice does as many things to promote the well-being of students. She gives students many verbal hugs daily and personalizes her comments to them with humor. She introduced a student, Joey, to me as her second husband and asked him to tell me why he was her second husband. With a smile on his face, Joey told me that he was 'her second husband' because he spent as much time with her as her husband did. Bernice then went on to commend Jack for his improved work and behavior. I could sense that Jack felt proud. Later, Bernice asked another student to tell me why Wildwood was a good school. The young lad turned to me and said without hesitation, "Because the Jonah boys are here." Bernice explained that the three Jonah brothers were new to the school and were working hard at being responsible students. These are just two of the many examples of the positive manner in which Bernice works with students. Each day I had the opportunity to have her introduce a student to me and to have that student hear her tell me something good about him or her. On one occasion a student in the Grade 5 class was having difficulty settling down because he had not taken his medication. He was being disruptive in the class, and the teacher had sent him to the office. Bernice first had the student take his medication and then asked him to accompany her on her walk about the school. To make the time productive for the youngster, she asked him to help her observe students in each classroom and report to her if they were on task. I observed the young lad with interest, and I must say that I was impressed with his observation skills. I was more impressed with the way in which Bernice's approach to dealing with him settled him down very quickly and let him return to his classroom work.

Parents and community members are recognized often for their efforts to support the students and the work of the school. Bernice introduced a mentor to me with, "I want you to meet Henry. He revives my faith in humanity by being here every week to work with one of our students." Comments such as "I don't know what we would do without your help" and "Thank you for making a commitment to our students" were exchanged regularly with parents and mentors.

Many supports have been put in place to ensure the well-being of students and their families. Working in partnership with several community agencies, Bernice has been successful in creating a coordinated delivery of services to students. Community agencies, the Capital Health Authority, Children's Services, and the school all work together to provide services to students from the school. Bernice has developed an excellent working relationship with all of these agencies, and she is learning to let them do their work with students and their families without her having to direct them: "I am learning not to micro-manage."

Parents are encouraged to use the many services available in the school and in the community, and the school is always willing to connect them to the services. One of the in-school services that is used frequently is the family therapist. Parents have gone to the family therapist with problems that they face with their children at home. One grandparent who is the guardian of one of the students in the school spoke of a problem with which the therapist had helped:

> My granddaughter was going backwards with her behavior. She was doing some very weird things at home. She had taken the mattress off her day bed and put it on the floor and was beginning to behave like a small child. I spoke to Mr. Frank and he helped me work with Susan, and very soon we had her back on track.

The school newsletter encourages parents to seek the help of the two family support workers attached to the school. "Kids driving you crazy? Want help that is free and confidential? Carla or Sheryl can help you. Call them at 432-1234." Carla described the service to parents in a school newsletter:

> I realize that it is difficult to trust an unknown person, such as Sheryl or myself, to come into your home and intervene in your family's life. I would like to somehow reassure you that our goal is not to intrude and tell you what to do. Our goal is to assist you identify changes that you would like to make in your own and your children's lives. We then support you in making those changes. It's all up to you. It's all voluntary. We work evenings as well as weekends to accommodate all families' needs. Our intervention is based on your needs, as well as those of your children. In addition, there is no cost to you!

Many parents have asked for help from the two individuals, and in some cases the school has put pressure on parents to access the service.

Individual staff members have also gone to the family therapist with personal problems. Problems with partners, problems with work, and problems with children have often been shared with the therapist, and one staff member commented, "He really helped me work through my problems."

Bernice has also contacted several community agencies and has been successful in getting them to provide programs for the youngsters outside of school time in the community. When she found that many students were unsupervised when they went home after school, she made arrangements for the local community league to provide a program for youngsters after school. She has also been successful in getting the Y and other community groups to offer programs for students during their spring and summer breaks from school.

In addition to making services available to students and their families, Bernice and her staff work diligently to make the school a warm, inviting, and safe place for learning. Visitors often commented, "This school is such a nice place to be," "There are so many good things happening for kids here," and "Everyone is so friendly, especially the principal."

Positive, Optimistic Approach

Words such as *positive*, *happy*, and *optimistic* have been used to describe the feeling tone and the environment at Wildwood School. The same words have also been used to describe Bernice as the principal of the school.

Bernice uses humor to maintain the positive tone in the school. One of the teachers reflected:

> Bernice is so funny in her approach with the kids. Once, when one of our classes misbehaved on the bus on a field trip, she brought the whole class into the office, set up chairs like the seats in a bus, and then positioned herself in a chair at the

> front like the bus driver. She then role played with the students what was appropriate behavior. It was quite funny to watch. I'm sure the students are going to behave in future.

Another instance when I observed her using humor with students was when she learned that three girls from the Grade 6 class had gone to the library to get some books on magic so that they could cast a spell on their teacher. She asked the girls about their ability to cast spells, and she told them that she would really like them to cast a spell on her so she could lose weight. The girls went away laughing.

Many also commented on the fact that she is always in a good mood. "She's always got something nice to say," "She always has a welcome smile on her face," "She is always saying funny things," and "She can always see the good in any situation" were frequent observations.

Several staff members commented that Bernice has "a very special personality" and that "she gets away with saying the funniest things because of who she is." "How many principals do you know who would dress up like Cruella DeVille in the Walt Disney movie *1001 Dalmatians*, knowing full well that you would be hosting the Prime Minister at the school on that day?" and "Imagine her standing in the hallway in her lime green suit, telling some rough and tough male parent to remove his shoes when he comes into the school!" On several occasions I heard her call the researchers from the university "eggheads," only to see them get a smile on their faces. One of them even said that Bernice should get them T-shirts with that title. I got the feeling that she uses humor with people because she genuinely likes them.

Visibility and Accessibility

Bernice has made it a priority to be visible in the school, and she has expectations that all the staff will be visible. One of the reasons has been to ensure that the school is safe. As well, she believes that her visibility helps to set the tone of the school and sends

the message that the staff cares about the school. One of the teachers pointed out that this is not the case in every school:

> I know that I've been in some schools where the principal and the staff rarely go out in the hallways before school, at lunch, and after school. That's not the case here. The staff is always in the hallways and in the lunchroom. And the principal is also there. When we see her out and about we feel we should be doing the same.

A mentor credited Bernice with this visibility:

> I am here every week, and I always see Bernice in the hallways or in a classroom. She often stops in to the Reading Room to see what's going on. Her presence is a real motivator for people who work in this school.

The staff have valued her accessibility and have often been able to share information with her that they might not have had she not been so accessible. With an open office door and open doors in the classrooms, everyone notices when she is out and about. Bernice encourages everyone on the staff to have a visibility in the school, and the staff has seen the value in being visible. One can often see the custodian working in the hallways.

The staff, students, and parents also commented on her attendance at all the events in the school. The staff and the students remarked on her attendance at functions outside the school that have involved the students. One student who is a member of the cheerleading team stated, "She even came to our competition at Vic!"

Bernice acknowledged that this visibility has a purpose. "If you say visibility is important, then you'd better model it." She wants people to feel comfortable around her, to talk to her and ask her questions. In particular, she wants to be able to get to know the students and their parents. Her visibility is strategic. When she goes to events where parents are present, she often says a few words to each of the parents who are in attendance. She has also made a commitment to being visible in the community, because she believes that she has a role to play in advocating not only for her school but also for

public education. She always lets the staff know when she is absent from the school, and she provides them with follow-up information.

Practices at Wildwood School

The philosophy and the people have come together at Wildwood School, and practices have developed which enhance the school and provide success for all within. Bernice has been a model for demonstrating this philosophy. Everyone shares the accountability for the school's results, flexibility and risk-taking have been encouraged, and staff has been proactive in handling issues.

Modeling

Bernice Wonder has put a set of practices into place at the school that has enabled the school to become more successful in ensuring success for all. One of the practices that she has implemented is modeling the philosophy and beliefs she values. She often speaks of "walking the talk" and is confident that people will judge her by what she does rather than by what she says. She believes that when the adults in the school function as a democratic community, resolving inevitable differences and making complex decisions in an open, participatory, and respectful manner, students will learn these ways as well.

Although Bernice does not formally teach a class in the school, she is constantly modeling that she is a teacher. As she visits classrooms, she observes for good teaching practice with teachers and she shares her observations informally with the teachers following her visits. She always focuses on the positive, and, if necessary, she does not shy away from sharing her observations about aspects of the teacher's practice that are not appropriate or can be improved. In working for improved practice, she provides the teacher with an opportunity to reflect on what he or she was doing, and only then does Bernice share her observations with the teacher. Then, jointly, they come up with strategies to improve the teacher's practice. One teacher commented on Bernice's modeling for her in the classroom: "She's really good because she models what she

expects. She takes you through all the steps and then she goes back and reflects on what she just did. And then she ties it to theory."

A parent saw her modeling effective ways of relating to the students. She said that this has had an impact on her behavior when it comes to dealing with young people:

> I see her teaching the students all the time. She's out there talking to them, reminding them why they are in school and what appropriate behavior looks like. She respects the kids, and she is always letting them know how good they are and how much they have learned. Now I try to do the same thing when I am with the kids at home and also in the school. And it works!

Bernice has a wide knowledge of issues in education, particularly as they relate to elementary schools and equality of opportunity. One of the teachers commented, "She's just a more rounded leader who is very skilled. I can tell she's more visionary, and her work on the City Center project is very reflective of where she is now." Another added:

> She's always asking us if we are meeting the needs of all the students in our classroom. She asks us to think about the way that we're doing things in our classroom, to think about our strengths, our weaknesses, and how she can help with the weaknesses. She always asks us to write down the names of the students who are doing really well and also the names of those who are struggling. Then she asks us how we are meeting the needs of all the students.

The staff saw Bernice's modeling as motivating and in turn saw the importance of their own modeling for their colleagues and also for students. One staff member commented on Bernice's impact on her role as model: "She doesn't snipe and be unpleasant even on a rough day. She always puts her best foot forward. It says to me that I need to at least make an effort." Another spoke of the importance of teachers being role models for students: "I think it is important that the students see us doing what we talk about to them, like being on time and being positive."

The preparation of her staff for leadership is a role that Bernice has taken very seriously. She has offered many members of her staff several opportunities to grow and develop their skills in the school and in the district. Professional development is one area that is very important. She reads a lot and often provides staff with ideas to ponder. One

teacher commented, "She is always leaving notes in our mailboxes about a new program, some new research, or just something that looks interesting. I now find myself doing the same thing with my colleagues."

During the lunch hour one day, a student came to the staff room to show Bernice a tissue box cover that she had made. Bernice praised the student for her work and then asked her if she would show the Busy Bees in the preschool program how to make the cover. She was in essence trying to show that students could model, too. I observed her asking students to model for their peers on many different occasions. Everyone shares in the important practice of modeling at Wildwood School.

Shared Responsibility and Accountability

Bernice Wonder has the responsibility and the accountability for the results achieved at Wildwood School in the areas of student achievement, attitudes, finances, and the condition of the building. The staff willingly shares this responsibility and accountability. One often heard individuals including Bernice, use the word *we* as school matters were discussed. Bernice's position is:

> You are only as good as the people you surround yourself with, and everything that we have done at this school has been because of relationship building. We couldn't have done it if it wasn't for people willing to get dirty, take a bit of a risk, fail a little bit, brush ourselves off, and start all over again. Because of this, I believe we have been able to do some good pioneering work. You can't dance by yourself.

Improved student achievement is a priority for the school, as it is in the school district. On a regular basis Bernice and the staff review the results that have been achieved in this area both in classroom assessments and in external measures. At the beginning of the year at the first staff meeting, the staff is asked to review the provincial achievement results and the district's attitude survey results from the previous year and to discuss why they may have achieved those results. Bernice reminds the staff, "At Wildwood, we don't make excuses, we make improvements." The staff, working in

groups, is asked to identify two areas for improvements and to come up with one idea for each improvement that can be put into place "RIGHT NOW!" She also reminds them that great leaders do not make great schools; great staffs are what make great schools.

The staff also assumes responsibility and accountability for the building. The school was completely modernized in 1996, and although the custodian has primary responsibility for the cleanliness of the building, each staff member is expected to contribute to maintaining the level of cleanliness. As well, students, parents, and community are encouraged to respect and maintain the building.

Staff, parents, and members of the community have assumed responsibility for advocacy for Wildwood School in the community at large.

Bernice is accountable for her school budget and for the significant amount of money that various community organizations have put into the school. Discovering that the school had a $65,000 deficit when she arrived five years ago was a shock. Balancing the budget in a span of two years took great skill. The staff has commended her for clearing the deficit and for surviving the cutbacks in provincial funding to the schools that occurred in 1995. One staff member said:

> For two years we were constantly reminded that we had to tighten our belts. Bernice is really strong in that department and also very practical in making sensible choices for things like maintenance. Now we have money for all kinds of things.

Bernice has also modeled accountability for her actions by always indicating to staff when she would not be in the school and where she was going. On her return to the school, she has always informed the staff of what she was doing and what she learned, and she has shared materials that she has collected. Because of her reputation as an innovative and outstanding educator in the city center, she is more likely that her other elementary principal colleagues to be invited to participate in out-of-school activities.

Bernice believes that school-based budgeting and school-site decision-making have enabled the school to provide excellent learning opportunities for the students. They have provided the freedom for innovation and enhanced educational opportunity in the school.

Flexibility and Openness

Flexibility and openness have become an integral part of Wildwood School's operating philosophy. People have been encouraged to change, to try new things, and to do things in new ways. The administrative assistant noted that she has dealt with a change:

> Bernice keeps me informed of all the changes that are going on in the district in regards to time recording, budget planning, service requisitions, etc., and she tells me that we need to keep up with the changes. I've gone to in-services with the support staff consultant, so that keeps me informed as well. I went to in-services on *Quickbooks*, and I love it!

The coordinator of the mentorship program commented that Bernice demonstrates her flexibility and openness:

> She can be dealing with so many things at one time. She could be talking to a social worker, and then I'll walk in and talk to her about a luncheon being planned for the mentors, and she is able to shift gears so quickly. Then right after me a teacher will walk in and talk about a problem with a student. She's so flexible.

Staff members are gaining confidence in being more open and flexible in their classrooms and the school.

The family therapist has appreciated her openness and her willingness to listen as well. If he has an idea as to how to work with a student and the student's family, he knows that Bernice will listen and be open to discussion. One of the students also recognized Bernice's openness: "If you have a problem, you can always go to Ms. Bernice and she will help you."

This flexibility and openness have led to some different approaches to programming for students since Bernice arrived at Wildwood School. One of the most significant shifts in programming was focused on achieving success with all students. The Adaptation program in the school was closed, and programming designed to meet the needs of all students in the regular classroom was developed. The school has adopted the Balanced Literacy program school-wide, and the adoption of this program was teacher initiated. The school has no pullout programming except for the Reading Recovery program in Grade 1 for students who have not achieved the expected growth with their reading.

The in-school mentorship program has required that the staff be flexible. Students spend 30 to 45 minutes once a week with their mentors, and hence several students can be away from the regular classroom at any one time. The staff has learned to be flexible, though some members did ask Bernice if the time with the mentor could be blocked for their classes. This blocking would assist teachers in planning for the students who would be out with their mentors. Bernice has listened to their request and has blocked the time for mentors.

Bernice recognizes students for their achievements and efforts on a daily basis. Staff members recognize students' efforts with a positive referral, which then gets read to the school during the morning announcements. Students being recognized then spend some time with Bernice and get to choose a token from the goody boxes in her office. This practice requires that the teachers be flexible with their programming.

Over the past year the school district, with Bernice's leadership, has been developing a plan to revitalize programs in eight city-center schools. It is envisioned that the many programs that are currently offered at Wildwood School can be extended to the other schools and the 1,500 students in the area. This will require that the staff be open and flexible to change. My observations of the staff in meetings to discuss the project are

that they are ready and willing to accept change and open to and flexible in being part of the project.

Another aspect of the school in which Bernice has accepted that there can be flexibility is in staffing. When Bernice arrived at Wildwood School, she had let the staff know that the school would be operating with full-time staff members only because she believed that part-time teachers in a class disrupted the continuity of programming for students. Although Bernice maintains that this approach has some merit, over the past year she has allowed two teachers to share a class. These two teachers have demonstrated to her that they work closely and as a team, and they have convinced Bernice that having two teachers in a classroom can work.

The same flexibility has been demonstrated in Bernice's approach to performance appraisals in the school. As part of the process, each staff member is asked to complete a self-appraisal. Bernice has accepted many different formats for the self-appraisal from a checklist to a video presentation.

The flexibility that is provided to staff is expected of them as they work in the school with colleagues, students, and parents. Staff members who are not willing to be flexible have been encouraged to transfer to another school. As one teacher commented, "Working with Bernice, you had better be able to accept change, to learn, and to grow."

Many teachers have been encouraged by this openness and flexibility to do innovative things in their classrooms. Bernice commented on this: "Students are being given choices in activities, and the range of activities is quite interesting." The notion of choice permeates the whole school program. One of the teachers experimenting in a science class had this to say: "I know that if I try something and it doesn't work, Bernice will support me. I just think she likes us to try new things."

The school is flexible in the ways that they encourage parents to be involved with the education of their children. Parents are encouraged to come to the school and participate in all activities, and they are made to feel welcome whenever they come.

However, Bernice is adamant that when the school invites the family to come for a particular activity, children will not be able to attend without an adult family member. Bernice described the strategy:

> I believe many of our parents do not have effective strategies to work with their children. Parents don't seem to know how to interact with their children and support them with their learning. We invite parents to come to school so that we can help them. This is why, if students come without an adult to any of our five family nights, the family picnic, math night, or the community breakfast, we do not allow them to attend.

Parents have accepted her position, and she is pleased that the number of families attending school events is growing.

Some of the questions that Bernice is constantly asking herself as she evaluates the school program are, Are we flexible enough? Are we being open to our students, parents, and the community? There are many things that continue to be challenges. One of these is student punctuality and attendance. Although the school has made some significant gains with attendance and punctuality, she continues to look for ways to improve things even further.

Being Proactive

Bernice believes strongly that by being proactive, an individual experiences fewer problems. Those around her have seen her as one who demonstrates this skill effectively. One staff member stated, "Bernice has an intuition for the way things might unfold, and she has the strategies to take charge before it becomes a problem."

Bernice's proactive stance has been directed mainly to student issues. If she receives information that a student's health or safety may be compromised, she contacts the Child Welfare workers to "give them a heads up." In doing so, she has averted a crisis for many of the students in her school. If a student is not looking well or behaving in an uncharacteristic manner, Bernice often asks the school nurse or the family therapist to

spend some time with the student and, if needed, to work with the family. The school nurse described her involvement:

> We have some kids from preschool and up who have been referred for neuro-developmental assessments. I've been the bridge between the home and school and making sure that the forms are filled out. If we did not have the forms signed, we would not be able to go through with the assessments.

At a meeting with parents, they indicated that their children were not using a local youth club because it was not a safe place. Bernice listened with interest and made a mental note to follow up with the director of the club, so that if there were problems, they could be dealt with before things got worse. She takes the same action with information that she receives about any of the services that are offered to students in the community.

Bernice is also proactive in her relationships with staff. One of the staff members suffers from depression, and Bernice knows that when things get busy at school, such as in the spring with budget and report cards, the individual can miss work. She has made it a point to check with the individual to see how things are going and to support the individual in dealing with the stress. She extends the same kind of support to a support staff member who at times feels overwhelmed with the work. The support staff member commented, "Bernice has been out of the school for quite a bit of time this year with her involvement in the City Center project, and things are just busier. There are some days that we don't even get a chance to talk. But she'll phone me at home to see how things are going."

Acknowledging and Celebrating

Acknowledging and celebrating students, parents, staff, and community members is an integral part of life at Wildwood School. Student achievement and performance are acknowledged and celebrated every day as Bernice deals with the positive referrals. She makes an announcement over the public address system, naming each student and what he or she is being recognized for. She often personalizes her comments about each

student with statements such as, "Wow, can you believe this? 180 nights of home reading! Way to go Brendan," "Joey showed us that he was doing it the Wildwood way," "Katie, I just know that you will be going to university with the amount of reading you are doing," and "Tracy, your parents will be proud of you, just like we are."

Student assemblies are held every month, and individual students are recognized for their academic achievement as well as behavior as positive role models in their classes, with certificates presented by their teachers. All the students who have achieved perfect attendance for the month join Club Wildwood and have their names entered in a draw for a computer that is installed at home. All students who have received a positive referral have their names entered in a draw for a goody basket containing books, school supplies, and a stuffed animal. Also, the students who are recognized have their pictures taken with their teacher and their parents, if they are present. These pictures are then displayed in the hallways.

The display of student work throughout the school is another means by which the school celebrates and acknowledges students. Samples of student writing, art work, and individual projects brighten every corner of the school, and parents and visitors enjoy the displays as they visit the school.

Bernice is highly skilled in acknowledging and celebrating the staff. Notes, small gifts, and positive comments are routine expressions of her appreciation for the staff's efforts and also special occasions such as birthdays, moving to a new house, or having a baby. Staff members have expressed amazement with her ability to do this so effectively: "The hundreds of cards that she somehow finds time to write not just to me but to everybody," "She's always very positive, and she always has lots of nice things to say," "Something as simple as little prizes at a staff meeting. It's kind of silly but it's nice," "She knows that I love cats, so there are often kitty things," "She's always giving compliments, and for me it is all the responsibility that she gives me," "I think that Bernice recognizes the good work that you're doing more than other principals, whether

it is thank you notes or books or even just putting it in the morning message," and "It's a positive when she recommends you to present at a conference or recommends that teachers from other schools come to visit your classroom." The staff receives books at the monthly staff meeting to acknowledge their efforts, and they can be assured of getting flowers if they have distinguished themselves professionally, such as being recommended for the Edwin Parr Award or being nominated for the Excellence in Teaching Award.

Parents and community members working in the school are recognized in a similar fashion for their efforts on behalf of the students in the school. Thank you notes, small gifts, and positive comments are standard practice. Each month one parent who gives time to the school is selected as 'parent of the month,' and the individual's name is highlighted on the sign in front of the school. In addition, the parent receives a bouquet of flowers and a voucher for dinner at one of the local restaurants. Parents who attend the assemblies are publicly commended for taking an interest in their child's schooling, and parents who attend the full series of reading workshops receive a $25 voucher to a local store that carries a selection of good books along with food items.

Anytime I was introduced to a parent or community member, Bernice always had a positive comment about the individual. I could tell from the smiles on their faces that they felt appreciated.

Bernice acknowledges and celebrates the students, the staff, and the parents of Wildwood School in the community, and through her own admission she feels that people get tired of her singing the praises of her school. A community member expressed her feeling about this type of acknowledgment and celebration in a letter to the school:

> Last year every time I drove past your school I smiled because of the messages on the sign in the schoolyard. They were always so positive and uplifting. I was filled with gratitude that in a neighborhood that often gets 'bad press,' our community school was showing respect for their students and their families. During the summer I loved to watch the progress of the Millennium Garden. Having the garden there reminded me that I lived in a caring community with a caring school staff. Early in September your sign said, "Wildwood has Great Students, Great

> Parents, Great Staff." Every time I drove by that sign my eyes filled with happy tears. Being an adult educator, a mother, and a grandmother, I know that we get what we expect from those in our care. Your messages say you expect great things. It may be the fruits of your labor won't be seen for many years, but please know that Wildwood students have accomplished great things in the past and, because of your dedication, I believe will continue to do so. Thank you for caring.

The practices at Wildwood School reflect Bernice's beliefs and values about modeling democracy, creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, and nurturing healthy relationships for students, staff, and parents.

People and Relationships

Bernice likes people and she is at her best when she is around people. She is skilled at building relationships and works at maintaining them. She works at developing the concept of 'family' at the school; one that includes students, staff, parents and members of the community. She is a keen observer and a good listener. Listening and observing allows her to be alert to the state of the school and the life in it.

She knows the importance of personalizing the school. Support systems have been put in place to assist students be successful and each member of the school family is treated fairly, with dignity, and with humor.

The School Family

Traditionally, school leaders talk about building 'teams' to promote the notion of people working together. Bernice insists that at Wildwood School the term that better describes people working together is *family*. Her view is that viewing the relationships in the school with a sports metaphor and the term *team* denotes competitiveness. She believes that the term *family* signifies connection, responsibility, caring, and strength; and it is this sense of family that she strives to achieve for everyone in the school. The school family consists of students and staff, and both are vital in the life of Wildwood School. Bernice shared an anecdote that reflects the sense of family in the school:

> One of our teachers was nominated for the Excellence in Teaching Award, but she refused to sign the nomination form. When asked why she would not, she expressed that to do so would be to negate the work done by the other members of the school family. She was willing to accept a bouquet of flowers instead.

Students and staff are constantly guided to see their importance in the scheme of things and to recognize that their words and their actions contribute to the health and welfare of the entire Wildwood School family. Parents and community members are invited to be part of the school family by helping the students with learning and by supporting the work of the school.

Listening, Observing, and Asking Questions

Bernice has a comprehensive knowledge about what goes on in Wildwood, and many have commented on her ability to keep on top of things. One teacher noted, "I really admire her, I really do. She's always on top of things even though she wears so many hats. I don't know how she does it."

When she is in the school, Bernice spends very little time in her office. She is usually walking about the school observing and listening, and often asking questions. She finds that doing this allows her to learn—learn about students, learn about staff, learn about the school, and learn about her leadership. She is on a continual quest. A teacher commented on Bernice's observation skills and the impact that it had on her:

> She seems to notice all sorts of things, everything. I was teaching science, and after she had observed me for a short while she said, "I know that you like science. I could tell from the smile on your face." I told her then that I loved science, and that is why I became a Grade Three teacher. This really brings the best out in a person.

Students know that Bernice asks a lot of questions. When she is with them at recess time or lunchtime, she often asks them about how they are doing with their schoolwork, about how their parents are doing, and about what is going on in the community. Through this questioning she usually learns about happenings that give her confidence that things are going well for the individual, or she learns that support needs

to be provided. Often, the information is provided to her in subtle ways. A teacher commented on what she perceived was Bernice's motive in asking questions: "I think she asks all these questions because she wants us to think about whether we are doing the best for our students."

With her keen listening and observation skills, Bernice is able to identify potential problems. A parent commented on how she listens to students:

> She really tries to understand the students. When she talks to the kids, she asks them a lot of questions, and it is quite funny to see them answer her. I think they know she listens and that she really cares for them.

It would be easy to conclude that knowing everything in a school with less than 200 students is not a formidable task. Wildwood is a very busy place. With so many things going on in the school, Bernice confesses that it is sometimes difficult to keep on top of things. This past year she has been seconded to Leadership Services for half of her assignment, and she has found that doing two different jobs has caused some problems. With her absence from the school, she has found that there has been less attention to detail and that some important tasks were not done because she was not there to ask the questions. She has indicated to the superintendent that she does not wish to have a split assignment for the coming school year.

Personalizing the School

Bernice is a "people person." She enjoys being around people and is always interested in each one of them as an individual.

There is a welcoming atmosphere in the school. If there is a new student in the school, Bernice personally meets and welcomes the student and the parent to the Wildwood family. At the end of the new student's first day in school, the classroom teacher and Bernice make it a point to ask the student how the day went and to let the child know that Wildwood is happy to have him or her as a member of the family. All new students are recognized in the school's monthly newsletter, and they are

congratulated for choosing to join a wonderful school. Student birthdays are recognized in the morning announcements and also in the school newsletter.

Parents are always welcome in the school. Bernice can usually be found in the hallways at the beginning and at the end of a school day when most of the parents are in the school, dropping off and picking up their children. Once again, she asks the parents a lot of questions and through their responses is able to learn about what is going on in the children's lives. Parents have commented on the positive atmosphere in the school: "Everyone smiles and looks happy," "There are so many things for our kids here," "Everyone is so willing to help," and "Ms. Bernice is so funny; she is always laughing with the kids."

A custom that is unique to Wildwood School contributes to personalizing the school. Many of the adults working in the school are called by their first names, with Mr. or Ms. added to denote respect. I was called Ms. Usha while I was at the school, and I still recall the warmth in having the student and parents call me by that name.

Bernice uses humor to personalize the school for the students. She has nicknames for many of the students, such as Joey my second husband, Miss Bubba, and Chase, my man. I observed the smiles on the students' faces when she called them by these names. When she recognizes students in the morning announcements, she not only says the name, she adds a comment for each student. One teacher recounted a funny story about the morning announcements:

> I had told Bernice that my students were having difficulty settling down for the announcements. Part way through the announcements she said, "Settle down, Busy Bees, I can see you." Well, the whole class settled right down because they believed that she could really see them!

Staff commented on the personal touches in the school. Whenever a staff member goes off to an in-service or a meeting, Bernice always gets back to them to compliment them on their contribution to the session. It becomes obvious that she has called the

presenter to find out about the staff member's participation. She does this for students and parents as well. Students are amazed that by the time they have returned from a field trip, Ms. Bernice has some information on how they performed at the site. She also lets them know if they have not brought pride to the school.

Bernice has also made the physical environment of the school look more like a home. Comfortable wingback chairs and a sofa offer seating to visitors in the general office and also in the principal's office; soft chairs are scattered around the school for students, giving them a comfortable place to relax and read and dream; and even the washrooms in the office have been transformed to look like a washroom at home with cloth hand towels, scatter mats, and pictures. The library has a real tipi set up, and one can find students and mentors sharing a book in this quiet space. The floors are spotless, and everyone takes their shoes off when they enter the school.

Bernice likes writing personalized messages to people. Staff, students, parents, mentors, and visitors to the school all get cards from Bernice. Many commented on how she could, with very few words, give a person a profound personalized message.

The staff gets notes from Bernice for all the special days during the year—Christmas, Easter, Valentine's, birthdays, anniversaries, and other special days. She often buys flowers and small gifts to recognize professional achievements of staff. They have found these notes and tokens very meaningful. One teacher described her sentiments: "She's always buying little things and putting little treats here and there. Very often they are so perfectly matched to the individual. You know it comes with such caring and respect; it's not just a token." When I asked Bernice about when she finds the time to carry through with this huge task, she told me that she usually write the notes at home after a full day at school.

Bernice acknowledges every individual who has supported the important work at Wildwood. In addition to a personalized note, she writes something about every one of

them in the newsletter. Every contribution is recognized. The recognition shows the warmth and caring:

> There exists a kind lady in our city who consistently remembers the students at Wildwood School with a donation to the morning snack program. She is a senior citizen who believes in giving back to the community. You are a wonderful lady, Sabina! Hope all your animals are well too!

and

> Thank you again to a group of outstanding junior high students for their contribution to Wildwood School. Most recently, these students helped our school family celebrate our first Good Behavior Day at Red's Bowling Alley. These same students will be called upon during the year for their help. The next time you hear about junior high students in a negative light, please remember this great Bunch from Dan Knott Junior High.

and

> Thank you to the mystery man who left a HUGE bag of brand new stuffed animals for a mentor to give to Miss Diane. You snuck out on us! Thank you to the mystery man! These were shared with the Fabulous Fours for bringing pride to Wildwood School. They displayed exceptional behavior at the Zoo. What pride this brings Wildwood School!

I too received two cards from her during my time at the school, one for helping with the family potluck and the other for being a participant in the School Partners meeting on the budget.

Bernice has attempted to personalize the school by keeping the class sizes small and by having teachers stay with a group of students for two years. She has had one group of students stay with a teacher for three years and has concluded that three years with one teacher creates an unhealthy dependency for students. Next year, one class of students will have their teacher for a second year. Although she would like to see this as standard practice throughout the school, she is cognizant of the fact that unless the teachers support this concept, it will not work. She has not been able to organize the school to have small classes throughout the school and attributes this to working within the constraints of the school budget.

Support Systems

Wildwood has many support systems in place for students, staff, and parents. Support is available for students with their academic work as well as for their mental and physical health.

Academic support is provided in the classrooms. With the introduction of the Balanced Literacy program to support the school-wide focus on literacy, individual needs in the academic area are more easily accommodated in the classroom. There are, however, some students who are not showing the expected growth in reading in Grade 1. These students are provided with additional support in the Reading Recovery program. There are teaching assistants in several classrooms, and the additional adult in the room allows for one-on-one assistance to students who may require the support. The family therapist also provides support with the academic program by working with the parents on study skills, goals setting, and setting limits.

Support for emotional needs of students is available from the school staff and also from the family therapist who is resident in the school. Students are informed that their teachers are the first people that they can go to if they are concerned or worried about something. Teachers seek the help of the family therapist if the student's concerns are serious or if they sense that the student may not be safe. The family therapist often involves the parents of the child.

Support for the physical needs of students is provided through the nurse and through other community agencies working with the school. The nurse is in the school one day every week, and she is able to provide support to students and their parents. The hot lunch program and the morning snack are supports for the health of students. The local Family and Community Services center offers after-hours sport activities for the students and also provides programming during the school holidays.

Parents believe that the strongest support for the children is the staff's belief in the children and their ability to be successful. One parent put it his way: "Just to hear the

principal say 'I know you can do it' is enough. It's got to make the kid feel like he can do it."

The staff is confident that the supports are there for them as well. Being a small staff, they are effective in supporting each other. The staff believes that if they need help they can get it from Bernice, the family therapist, or a colleague. Many staff members get support from the family therapist with matters that relate to family.

One of the ways that Bernice has supported the teachers is to remove from their plates all the tasks that take time away from their critical task of teaching. If they need support with discipline or with curriculum and instruction, Bernice either provides it or connects them with people who can provide support. If they need resources, she connects them with the resources. The staff also has access to funds for professional development, and she is always there to support them with an encouraging word.

She helps out with student discipline, but teachers have indicated that they send students to Bernice only if all else fails. The staff indicated that the greatest support has been her trust in them as professionals:

> She has the amazing ability to make everyone from a parent to the custodian to the secretary to the teachers, young and old, to feel like they are just so very important and so very appreciated. It's very special to come to work every day and know that your principal thinks so very highly of you.
>
> She gets staff around her that she knows are willing to work, and then she gives you the opportunity to grow. She empowers you and makes you feel like "I'm in control." I think that's a real gift.
>
> Last year I got to go to the IRA conference in New Orleans. She gives you the opportunities to feel that your profession is important and what you're doing is really important. It makes you want to work harder.
>
> She appreciates everything you do so much that I think it makes a difference. I work about twelve hours a day, but it doesn't seem so long when you get so much recognition for it and you know you're appreciated.

As well, parents receive a lot of support from Bernice and the school. The home support workers are available to parents in the home and are there to assist with challenges in family life. All teachers and Bernice are available to parents with relation to the academic program, the school nurse is available to connect parents with agencies that provide support with health matters, and the family therapist is available to provide psychological support.

Not only has Bernice given support, but she has also received a lot of support from everyone in the school. With her double assignment and her involvement with the City Center project, she has been extremely busy. Staff have pitched in and picked up some of her work at the school. When the assistant principal resigned and indicated that he would not be returning to the school, two of the teachers volunteered to pick up the responsibilities of the assistant principal without giving up any of their teaching load. Bernice also calls on staff in central office for support, and she indicated that they have been a great resource for her.

Involvement

Students, staff, parents, and community members have had the opportunity to be involved in the decisions that affect them at Wildwood School. Some decisions have been delegated to teachers. The issue of accessing consultant services is an example. Although the services are available only on a fee-for-service basis, Bernice sees this support as necessary for teachers. Each teacher determines what consultant support is needed and makes arrangements to access the service.

Another example of a decision that has been delegated to teachers and other staff members is professional development. Each staff member decides on the nature of his or her professional development, which is tied closely to his or her individual professional growth plans. These plans are required of all teachers in the province. Individuals take

into consideration the school and district priorities when developing their professional growth plans.

One of the most important activities and one that demands the involvement of students, staff, and parents is the preparation of the school budget. The school budget is actually the 'educational blueprint' for the school and involves setting school objectives, which are related to the district priorities identified by Board of Trustees. The school plan is developed for a three-year period and is reviewed annually. Bernice described the involvement of all the groups in the review this year:

> We are in the third year of a three-year plan, so the process is not lengthy. We sought input from the students, the staff, the parents, and school partners. We asked them to identify the things that we should continue with and what things we should think about. The staff provided their input at a staff meeting. The parents provided their input through a form sent home in the newsletter and also through the key communicators, and the school partners provided their input at a lunch meeting in the school. The students provided their input through activities in their classrooms. Once we had input from all the groups, we revisited the school plan and added some things and deleted some things for the coming school year.

Once the plan for the year if finalized, it is reviewed by a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees. Bernice ensures that at least one staff member is in attendance with her at the review. At the beginning of the school year, Bernice reviews the results that have been achieved in the school over the previous year. The staff is involved with her in this review, and the results are shared with the students, the parents, and the school partners. Based on the results achieved, adjustments are also made to the school plan. Through her listening, questioning, and open communication, Bernice is skilled at getting input from everyone.

Parents are actively involved in the school on an ongoing basis. Bernice invites them to be a part of the Wildwood family in all of her communications to them, and they accept her invitation. Many parents attend all of the school functions, and many parents participate regularly as volunteers in the school.

Members of the community are invited to be part of the school, too. Bernice has an uncanny way of cajoling individuals into becoming a school partner. She will often talk about the strengths that she notices in an individual and then go on to describe how she believes those strengths can be used to support the students in the school. All of this is done with much humor. Before one knows it, one is volunteering at the school. As one individual said, "It's hard to say no to her!"

Fairness

A school setting is complex with many requirements and conflicting demands, and treating everyone with fairness becomes a challenge. In a school where there is a full range of activities for students and their parents, the full participation of staff in all the activities can cause some conflict. A teacher commented on Bernice protecting their time:

> I think she wants us to be at all the once-a-month meetings with parents [in the evening,] but as soon as it is eight o'clock, you know she's going to call the meeting to a close. She doesn't drag it out until nine-thirty or ten.

Another teacher agreed:

> She never works any less than she expects anyone else to work. No one has ever complained because she's doing the same thing or more. How can we complain about having to work a little bit in the evening?

Bernice's perceived fairness is combined with honesty and directness, and everyone I talked to appears to have developed a loyalty to her. When asked how she does this, a teacher shared: "I've seen her work her magic with everyone. You know, they're just mesmerized. They're just in awe of her and all she does—how she quickly includes them in the Wildwood family. They feel very valued and appreciated."

Everyone in the school family is valued, and this comes through clearly in the school practices. All staff members have access to professional development and training, and Bernice ensures that they have the resources to do their jobs. The administrative assistant was able to attend a special session on a new financial management software

package and indicated, "I have the most up-to-date computer to do my job." Students, teachers, support staff, custodians, parents, and community members are recognized with equal importance for their contribution to the Wildwood family in the school newsletters. A teacher commented:

> She has this amazing ability to make everyone from every parent to the custodian to the secretary to the teachers, old and young, feel like they are just so very important and so very appreciated. It's very special to come to work every day and know that your leader thinks so highly of you.

Pride and Dignity

One of the school rules states, "Students shall choose to bring pride to Wildwood School." Staff and Bernice live by the same rule as well. Bernice feels that pride cannot be mandated; it is something that an individual chooses to display. If the individual feels valued, she is confident that he or she will choose to bring pride to the school.

Bernice values the students, the staff, the parents, and the school partners; and she communicates this to people in many ways. Her personal comments, her written notes, her regular acknowledgement of each individual's value in the school newsletter, and her positive talk about Wildwood and the members of the Wildwood family to others instill a sense of pride and create dignity in being part of the family. As one parent noted: "It's so wonderful to go places and to hear them speak of Wildwood School. I hear so many people say that at Wildwood they are doing this and that. I feel proud to be part of the school."

Bernice also believes that as staff, students, and parents are given opportunities to represent Wildwood School in the community, it develops a sense of pride and dignity.

> We got invited to a really important health forum, and we were the only school that got invited. It would have been ludicrous for us not to go. I couldn't go because I had another meeting. I made sure that Sue went. Not only did Sue go, she took Gordon with her. Both of them ended up facilitating a group at the forum.

Staff have presented at conferences in the district, at the teachers' convention, and to visitors from other school districts. Students have participated in activities with other schools, have performed at various venues in the city, and have done service projects in the city. All of these activities have contributed to the development of much pride and dignity at Wildwood.

Programs and Services

Several programs and services have been put in place to enhance the opportunities for students to be successful. The programs and services include the in-school mentors, the preschool, full-day kindergarten, small class size in Grade 1, Balanced Literacy, Reading Recovery, cheerleading, the family therapist, the school nurse, Roots and Wings, hot lunch and snacks, parent involvement, and community involvement. Some of the programs and services have been established for students, some for parents, and some for the community.

Programs and Services for Students

Balanced Literacy Program

The focus for Wildwood School has been literacy development, with the goal of having the children learn to read and write well for their age by the end of the school year. Several staff members approached Bernice with the idea of implementing the program. With Bernice, they put together a proposal to secure funding for the materials and release time for the teachers to participate. Bernice believes that the Balanced Literacy program provides a structured, systematic approach to language arts instruction for Wildwood School to achieve its literacy goal. However, she maintained that it is the program along with the other literacy activities in the school that are helping them to make good progress towards their literacy goals.

The program which has been implemented school-wide except for the Grade 6 level, is inclusive in its approach and provides direct instruction in reading and writing to meet the needs of all class members. It is designed to offer a balanced approach to literacy development with a strong literature base. Students receive direct instruction on spelling, word recognition and analysis, comprehension strategies, and writing on a daily basis. Each student works at his or her own instructional level, and the program is designed for use in classrooms with a wide range of student learning needs. The goal is to have students move from supported to independent learning in language arts.

Wildwood School has adopted the program based on the inclusive nature of the approach to literacy development and the support that is available for teachers in implementing the program. Participating teachers are provided with in-servicing, coaching and support for the first year, and consultative support in the second year of the program. Once teachers have completed the training, they are able to support other teachers with the program at the school. The school implemented the program in 1997, and to date the results have been mixed. Bernice finds that some students experience difficulties in the Balanced Literacy program and need specialized, one-on-one intervention to help them succeed.

Reading Recovery Program

For those students who are six years of age, in Grade 1, and experiencing difficulty with the Balanced Literacy program, the school provides additional support through the Reading Recovery program. The program is designed to move those students who are the lowest-achieving readers and writers to average levels in approximately 12 to 20 weeks. These students receive individual daily teaching, which can bring them to average levels of achievement and enable them to benefit from regular classroom instruction.

At Wildwood School the Reading Recovery program is provided through a trained volunteer. The volunteer who was provided with the Reading Recovery training through the school works with individual students for 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Bernice stated: "The school is really fortunate to have Miss Heather as our Reading Recovery teacher. How many volunteers do you know that will commit to giving time on a daily basis to our students? She is absolutely amazing!" She has made Reading Recovery available in the school because "it means that every student can have access to the best possible learning opportunities, every student can be helped to reach his or her potential, and fairness can be achieved and maintained."

Home Reading Program

The Home Reading program is structured to get students to read at home for at least 15 minutes daily. The classroom teacher provides the books to the students, the reading time is logged, and the teacher monitors the log on a continuous basis. At the end of the month, students who have taken their home reading home every night are eligible to win two gift certificates. One is for the family to go out for supper together, and the other is for the family to go to a bookstore and purchase $25 worth of new books. A supplement to the home reading program is the Book Buddies program. Through this program, older students are trained to be readers and commit to sharing a book once a week for eight weeks with a younger sibling at home.

Preschool Program

Many models for pre-schooling programming have been implemented in communities across the country. Almost all of the programs are offered by community agencies and require parents to participate with their children in the program. Bernice shared her thoughts on those programs: "I have some difficulty with programs that deny services to children because the adults in the children's lives are unable or unwilling to participate. This is why we started up a preschool program at Wildwood School."

The program, funded by a one-time grant from the Minister responsible for Children's Services, provides for a half day, five days a week, literacy-based program for 15 children between the ages of four and five years. The program is delivered by a certificated teacher and a teaching assistant who also has teaching credentials, and is operated as an integral part of Wildwood School. Many of the program activities focus on developing literacy skills, and a limited amount of time is spent in play. The students and the staff in this program participate in all of Wildwood School's activities, and parents are encouraged to participate in the program, though it is not a requirement. Bernice has seen the benefits of the program as a bridging experience between home and school for children in the city center. She believes that this type of experience is invaluable for children in high-needs areas of our city and their learning.

Wildwood School is the only school in the province that offers a preschool program. It is Bernice's strong connections in the community that allowed her to secure funding for the program this year. Although a community foundation has made a commitment to provide partial funding for the program for the next year, she will be faced with the challenge of finding the additional funding for the program for another year. It is her hope that, much like funding for full-day kindergarten, the provincial government will see the benefits of universal preschool programs for "at-risk" students and provide the funding for the schooling of these students from an earlier age.

A professor from the University of Alberta is carrying out a research project on this program, and Bernice is confident that the results will support the need for and the value of preschool programming for students in 'high-needs' areas of the city.

Full-Day Kindergarten

Bernice believes in the value of early intervention in meeting the needs of students. One of her concerns has been the student who comes to school with a shaky foundation for literacy. Because formal schooling begins with kindergarten, she believes

that if the students who are "at risk" are in a full-day kindergarten program, the school would be in a position and would have sufficient time to work on the development of a strong foundation for literacy. Bernice approached the superintendent with this idea, and although he was pleased that she was "thinking outside the box," no additional funding was to be made available to make the program possible. Unfettered, she then decided to find the funding on her own. Through her wide-reaching connections in the community, she was able to secure funding for the program for two years from an anonymous donor. Since then the provincial government has seen some merit in her proposal and in 1999 decided to fund a pilot project on full-day kindergarten in 20 schools in several high-needs areas in the city. The project is currently in its second year of implementation.

A professor from the University of Alberta is carrying out a research project with the full-day kindergarten program at Wildwood School, and the results look promising. The full-day kindergarten concept is included in the proposal for the City Center project in her school district. This project proposes to coordinate services and improve programming choices for about 1,500 elementary and junior high students in the city center. Bernice, working with seven principal colleagues, has provided most of the leadership for the project.

Bernice believes that full-day kindergarten for students at Wildwood School is here to stay, although she is uncertain as to how the program will be funded, whether by the province or the school district.

Small Class Size in Grade 1

One of the projects in which Bernice's school district is involved is the Small Class Size project under the auspices of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. Through this initiative, school districts were provided with funding to develop projects for school improvement. When the school district put out a call for participants for the

Small Class Size project, Bernice was quick to respond and indicate Wildwood School's interest.

Wildwood School is one of 20 schools with a small class size in Grade 1. The class size is set at a maximum of 15 students, with the assumption that with fewer students in the class, the achievement and performance of the students would improve. Bernice feels very strongly that we will see a difference only if the teacher teaches differently. "If teachers continue to teach the same way that they did when they had thirty students, we will see no difference."

Bernice works closely with the Grade 1 teacher and often engages her in discussion on an ongoing basis about what she is doing differently and what she is seeing as the results of the decrease in class size. She believes that small class size is making a difference for students at Wildwood School. Based on the results that she is seeing with the students, she has reduced the class size in Grade 2.

Literacy Based In-School Mentoring Program

When Bernice became the principal of Wildwood School, she immediately saw the need for a greater focus on student achievement in the school. She had heard about the Read to Succeed program, a reading support program developed by two researchers at the University of Alberta, and she believed that this program might fit the bill. The researchers had developed an interest in the potential of mentorship programs for "at-risk" children, and they were interested in documenting the effects, benefits, and dynamics of volunteer mentorship programs. They were looking for volunteers for their study when one of the researchers contacted Bernice. When the professor from the university approached Bernice about Wildwood School's possible participation in Read to Succeed project, Bernice saw the potential for a school mentorship program. She had been influenced by her experience as a board member of the Big Sisters and Big Brothers Society and the research on improved school performance of children with mentors. The

kindergarten class was selected for the program, and 12 university and college students were matched as mentors to kindergarten students in the Read to Succeed program that began at Wildwood School in January 1997.

Upon observing the results of the research project with the kindergarten class, Bernice saw the potential for a reading program for all students at Wildwood School in order to improve their academic performance. She raised this observation with the Director of the United Way. The United Way, with its emphasis on community development, encouraged Wildwood School to broaden this focus. In the fall of 1997 the United Way was successful in securing funding for the Partners for Kids program—a demonstration project with literacy as its focus—to address social and environmental issues in the community. In-school mentoring was identified as one key component of the program, and also included a range of family literacy and family support initiatives. A decision was made to implement the program in the Wildwood community. Other agencies in the community—the Family Center, the Big Sisters and Big Brothers Society, Success by Six, and Prospect Literacy—have become community partners in the delivery of "Partners for Kids" services to the Wildwood community.

Through the Partners for Kids program sponsored by the United Way, Wildwood School has been highly successful in establishing the In-School Mentorship program. The United Way provides the school with a full-time coordinator and $10,000 for books and other related costs for the program. The program coordinator also has responsibility for coordinating other family literacy activities in the school. These include the homework club, paired reading, and book buddies, as well as parental reading workshops. Success by Six has offered the Book Buddies program, which is built on the mentoring model by encouraging children to take books home to read to their preschool siblings. Books and recognition for the program are also supplied.

Currently Wildwood School has 154 mentors, although its goal is to have a mentor for all of its 182 students. Mentors spend between one half hour and an hour with

their matches each week doing literacy-based activities that have been planned by the classroom teacher. In the event that the classroom teacher is unable to plan the activity for the mentor and the student, the program coordinator has put together "book bags" with books at all reading levels on a specific topic (e.g., pirates). Almost all of the mentors come from outside the school's neighborhood.

Although Bernice does not manage the in-school mentorship program, she has insisted that the program coordinator have teaching credentials. The program coordinator described her role in the school:

> My training as a teacher with a background in child development and literacy has been extremely valuable in supporting the literacy focus of the program and the school. It has enabled me to provide ongoing practical advice and resources for mentors and has promoted the credibility of the program with the teachers.

In a survey on their view of the outcomes for mentors, mentors described the relationship between them and the students: "When I leave here I am pumped for the day—I've helped someone. You are giving to the child, the community, yourself," "Mentors get back ten times what they give; it provides a perspective or reality check that relationships are "what it is all about," and "It is rejuvenating."

Teachers have come to see the value of the program for their students, and all of them commented positively on the program. Their comments on the outcomes for students have included: "Mentors help children become more equipped socially and academically. A mentor enriches their world through reading and talking," "Mentors are good at encouraging children. As the relationship and trust builds with the mentor, children are less reluctant in taking risks in reading," "Beyond the teacher, it provides another positive role model of adult with expectations, who sees possibilities for the child and demonstrates a commitment to the child," "Mentors make them work—it is a structured time doing reading or literacy activities; providing limits, guidelines," and

"After a period of working with a mentor, children start to see their capabilities differently and are more positive about themselves.

Last year Wildwood School staff, students, and parents and the In-School Mentorship program were featured in the video promoting the annual drive of the United Way. This served not only to promote the in-school mentorship program at Wildwood, but also to advertise the ongoing need for mentors in schools.

Bernice believes that the Partners for Kids program of the United Way reflects the philosophy that the whole community has a role in supporting and caring for children: "It takes a village to raise a child." She sees the impact the In-School Mentoring is having on the students and described it:

> Our mentors become trusted friends to the children that they work with. Mentoring provides children with an increased sense of belonging and often leads to better communication skills and improved performance at school, home, and in the community. Both the mentor and the mentee benefit from knowing that they are making a difference in each other's lives.Beyond the teacher, mentoring provides another positive role model of an adult with expectations, who sees possibilities for the child and demonstrates a commitment to the child.

Hot Lunch and Snack Program

This program was is place prior to Bernice's arrival at Wildwood School. The United Way, through its School Lunch program, provides a hot lunch for students in several schools in the city, and Wildwood has participated since the program's inception. The program has two lunch supervisors who are staff of the School Lunch program and who assume full responsibility for the program. The Wildwood staff provides support to these individuals by being present in the lunchroom every day.

All the children in the school except for the preschool students participate in the program. Parents are asked to pay a dollar a day for the lunch, though many are unable to or do not pay. The school picks up the cost for the families that do not pay.

Also, all students are provided with a morning snack daily. The Inner City Church Corporation funds this program. There is no cost to the parents for this program.

The school staff sees the benefits of both these programs on the children's ability to learn. They commented: "The students are more alert, are able to focus better, and attend school more regularly."

Extracurricular Activities

The students at Wildwood are provided with opportunities to participate in a wide array of extracurricular activities. Bernice believes that it is nonproductive for schools to duplicate the services that are offered for students in the community. She described her efforts in getting community agencies to work in partnership with the school to provide these services:

> Some years ago we had a disagreement with Wildwood Family and Child Services. The disagreement related to the agency closing down their services during the Christmas holidays. I could not understand why they would close during the period when our students would be out of school. I told them I understood that their staff needed to take holidays, but I didn't understand why they had to take them during the Christmas period. I just didn't get it. So I approached a business in town and told them that I wanted to hire staff to offer our students a program at the school over the holidays. They not only paid for the program at the school, they paid for the students to go swimming every day and provided the transportation. Since then, we've managed to have not only the Christmas program but also a program over spring break as well, sponsored by the Y and the business.

Other activities are offered at the school, but many are offered at other sites in the community. After-school clubs, vacation camps, swim programs, and noon-hour games activities are provided by community agencies; and the school has an after-school music program that is supported by an anonymous donor.

In addition to these activities, each member of the staff organizes at least one club during the year. These clubs are offered during the noon hour, because Bernice is not willing to extend the workday for her staff. She recognizes that they give many extra hours to the school, and she wants to support them in achieving balance in their lives.

Some of the clubs that have been offered are cheerleading, choir, arts and crafts, reading, looking good, and computer. Students participate actively in these activities, and the staff monitor student participation to ensure that every student has the opportunity to participate.

Programs for Parents

Parent Involvement

Traditionally, it has been difficult to involve parents in 'high-needs areas' in their children's school. Bernice believes that parents care about their children's education and they want to be involved. One of the most important things for Bernice is to determine ways in which she can bring parents into a positive partnership with the school for the education of their children. A section in the school handbook invites parents to take part in school activities:

- Talk to your child's teacher or the school principal about what you can do.
- Volunteer as an aide.
- Visit the classroom.
- Attend school functions.
- Support fund raising events.
- Help with after school and before school programs.
- Attend Parent School Connection meetings . . . only 4 this year!

Mark the dates down on your calendar. These are the dates that we will be meeting as a group of parents. Meetings will go from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. Babysitting will be provided. **DOOR PRIZES! COFFEE! FOOD! FUN! GOOD LEARNING!**
Get involved any way you can—that's the important thing! (p. 11)

Bernice believes that providing parents with information about the school helps, and the school has endeavored to provide multiple avenues for them to receive the information. Wildwood School has provided a parent handbook, monthly school newsletters, monthly classroom newsletters, parent-teacher interviews, phone calls, reminders of upcoming school events, student agenda book entries, and personal contact to communicate with parents. Parent satisfaction with the communication has been

monitored through personal contact and the district's parent survey. Parents have indicated a high level of satisfaction with the communication from the school. Bernice has also reminded the staff "to please take advantage of the most quiet offers of help. Step by step is how we build trust."

Today, Wildwood School has active parent involvement. Parents are involved as key communicators, as volunteers for various activities in the school, and as supervisors on field trips. One parent also volunteers to check for head lice and is fondly known as the Lice Lady.

The school district has established the Key Communicator program to keep parents informed about the school's district, its programs, and its activities. Most schools have one or two parents identified as key communicators. At Wildwood, eight parents have volunteered to be key communicators and with their involvement have dispelled the myth that parents of children in 'high-needs areas' do not get involved in education. The organizer of the monthly meetings of parents commented:

> Wildwood School has the highest turnout for parent attendance at the Key Communicator meetings. The school has been represented at every meeting, and the school has consistently had the largest number of parents in attendance. This is quite an accomplishment for a school that has only 182 students!

Bernice or a member of staff accompanies the parents to the meeting, and on most occasions the school has paid for a dinner together prior to the meeting. Bernice has no doubt that the expenditure is worth it.

This group also functions as the school council, although they have not gone through the process of establishing themselves formally as the School Council for Wildwood. Bernice uses them as a sounding board and seeks their input into all decisions relating to learning and discipline in the school.

Bernice is constantly reminding everyone in the school community that family is important. The school supports this by planning several family activities each year.

Activities include a breakfast, a fun walk, a feast and Read-In, the Christmas concert, a craft night, a family potluck dinner, and a games night. Students can attend only if they have an adult member of their family with them, and they are encouraged to bring along an adult sibling, an aunt, an uncle, or a grandparent if the parent is unable to attend. Some students have been fortunate to have their in-school mentor accompany them to these activities. Parents are also encouraged to participate by supporting fund-raising events and help with after-school or before-school programs.

On an ongoing basis, Bernice communicates to parents that their support for their children's learning is critical for the success of the children. She encourages parents to model reading, to take an interest in and support their children's schoolwork, and to keep in close contact with their children's teachers. I participated in a math evening when parents were provided with ideas for doing math activities with their children at home. The gym was packed with students and their parents, actively engaged in learning together.

Services of the Family Therapist

An organization working under the umbrella of the United Way to support families provides the school with the services of a family therapist who works with children and their families in the development of life skills. This individual also works with the students in the development of pro-social skills and provides training for the student conflict resolution team.

The family therapist is available to guide parents individually in working to support their child's learning and regularly gives parents information in the school newsletter on topics such as anger management, goal setting, and setting limits.

Having the family therapist on site has allowed the school to be proactive in dealing with student issues. It has also allowed the staff to focus on teaching and allowed Bernice to spend more time to provide instructional leadership in the school.

Family Support Services

Parents also have access to the services of two family support workers. This service is provided to Wildwood School through and is funded by the Capital Health authority. The support workers who are part of the roots and Wings program, intervene with the family in the home and assist in making changes that the parents identify they want to make in their own and their children's lives.

The workers are available evenings and weekends at no cost to the parents. When parents have approached Bernice with issues such as "their kids driving them crazy," she has encouraged them to contact the family support workers. Parents indicated that "they trust the home-support workers and the school," and several parents have accessed the service.

Services From Other Agencies

A child welfare worker from the local office of Children's Services spends one morning a week in the school. Bernice and the staff are able to conference with the individual about students who may be in protective care or about students who they believe may require protective care.

A nurse from the Capital Health Authority spends one day a week in the school as part of the Capital Health Aim High demonstration project aimed at working differently with high-needs schools to improve the health and education outcomes for students. The nurse described how Wildwood School became part of the demonstration project: "Bernice whined and whined until I got here. I've never known anyone so pushy, as you well know. She complained to my boss until they couldn't stand her any longer, and they let me come here."

The nurse also provides support and acts as a resource to the teachers with the health curriculum. She provides information and classroom resources on health-related topics such as hand washing, dry brushing of teeth, maturation, and human sexuality.

A police officer spends time in the school as part of the Police School Liaison program and acts a resource to Bernice and the staff. The police officer leads the D.A.R.E. program and has brought community mediation into the school. Bernice shared that her experience with community mediation was not satisfying and one in which she would not rush to engage again. The police officer also mentors a student in the school.

Community Involvement and Business Partnerships

Wildwood School has several initiatives that take the school into the community and others which bring the community into the school.

The Community in the School

The school has opened its doors to the community at large. The only provision is that community members' presence in the school must in some way support the academic and discipline program for students.

The in-school mentorship program is the largest and most active initiative for community involvement in the school. Many individuals who actively volunteer in the community serve as mentors. Staff from a large management consultant firm and a large personnel agency have made their participation in Wildwood's in-school mentorship program a part of the 'gifts in kind' program sponsored by their companies. The mentorship program brings about 160 individuals from the community into the school on a weekly basis.

Charitable foundations have been a source of funding for several programs in the school. A foundation provided the resources to set up a math lab. Prior to the provincial government picking up the tab for the full-day kindergarten program, the same foundation provided the resources to establish an activity center classroom and extend the kindergarten program to a full day at Wildwood. In recognition of this support, the school has named the room after the foundation.

Several service clubs in the city support the school on an ongoing basis. The Rotary Club has built the school playground, provides agenda books for each student, and sponsors the Family Breakfast at the beginning of the year and the Family Picnic and Barbecue in October each year. They have also provided all the instruments and books for the music program. The school has named the music room the Rotary Club Room, and it has become a very special place or students. The Masons has three members who participate in the school by reading to students in the Grade 5 and Grade 6 classes. They also sponsor an annual picnic mentor and students who participate in the in-school mentorship program. The Lions Club and the Rebekah Lodge, although not involved in volunteering at the school, do provide the school with money to be used for students and their families.

Several other schools have also been involved in providing activities for the students at Wildwood School. The students of a large high school hosted the students and staff of Wildwood at a Christmas party complete with toys, food, games, and a visit from Santa Claus. Students from a junior high school helped out at Wildwood's Good Behavior day activities that were held at a local bowling alley. Bernice recognizes the value of older students working with younger ones, and she is grateful for their involvement and support.

Bernice spends a considerable time advocating for her school in the community. In order to get the resources to support the education at Wildwood, she finds herself faced with the dilemma of speaking about "deficiencies" in students: "As much as I try to advocate in a general sense, people are not interested when I speak generally. They become more interested when I speak about poor students. In my contacts with the community, poor pays." She has come to terms with this and stated that she can "rest easy" because it has resulted in extensive support for students and their education at Wildwood.

Business Partnerships

Many local businesses have also supported Wildwood School. A large home-furnishing company, through its Edmonton store, has been a strong supporter of Wildwood School. It has furnished the preschool classroom with child-friendly furniture, toys, resources, and musical instruments. Storage bins and comfortable chairs for reading and lovely area carpets have been provided for all the other classrooms in the school. The store has also given the school two sizeable donations of money, which the school has used to buy books for classroom libraries and the school library, to purchase classroom resources to support the curriculum, and to pay for the salary of the snack program coordinator. Bernice finds it incredible that "they do all this with little fanfare and no press coverage."

To celebrate its 25th anniversary, a large personnel recruitment firm in the city made a 'gift in kind' to Wildwood School. It provided the school with computers to establish a lab with 24 stations, and it has continued its support by providing its staff with time to volunteer in the school.

Teachers are encouraged to develop partnerships between their classes and businesses, and the Grade 5 teacher has done just that. A large oilfield exploration company supports the Breakfast and Exercise program for her class. Not only does it fund the program, staff members from their offices also act as resource persons for the curricular program.

Numerous other groups and individuals support the school with mentoring and volunteering; with tickets to sports activities, theatre productions, exhibits in the city, and other activities for children; with gifts for the children; and with money for books for the students.

Bernice confessed that she cannot relax in her efforts on behalf of the students at Wildwood School:

> I am always thinking of how I can get more support for the students at Wildwood School. Even when I am at a social function, I usually end up convincing someone to get involved with us. Sometimes my husband tells me that I need to take a break from it!

The School in the Community

At Wildwood School, Bernice and the staff believe that it is everyone's responsibility to give back to their community. The school gets so much from the community that they are always looking for ways to give back to the community. Every classroom in the school is involved in at least one community service project during the year. The choir has entertained at a variety of venues. Two classes made centerpieces for a business partner's Christmas party. Two classes made cards for seniors, and one class visited with them. The preschool students decorated flowerpots and presented them to the sponsors who made their program possible. All the students in the mentorship program created beautiful wreaths for the school partners at the United Way and Big Sisters and Big Brothers. All classes participated in making place mats for the Rotary Club Christmas Breakfast, and the choir entertained there, too. The school has also sent student artwork to be displayed in the hospitals.

Individual students are encouraged to volunteer in the school, and several opportunities are provided for this to occur. Students can volunteer as members of the conflict resolution team and the first aid team, as office helpers, as lunchroom helpers, and as helpers anywhere they might be needed in the school. The students have taken up the challenge and are active as volunteers in the school.

With the philosophy, the people, the practices, and the programs at Wildwood, the school has become a place that provides justice in education for the school family members. The school has been transformed with Bernice's leadership to a place where the programs and practices are clearly aligned with success for all and where trust and

responsibility are *de rigueur*. Bernice's leadership was the prime motivator for the change.

Bernice Wonder: The Person

If you were to telephone Wildwood School and access the principal's voice mailbox, you would receive this message:

> Hi! This is Bernice Wonder. Sorry I can't take your call. I'm either on another line or bee-bopping around the school doing a walkabout, seeing Wildwood students reading, computing, and making good choices. Our kids bring lots of pride to Wildwood School. Please leave a message; I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Until then—think big, do things right.

As I reflected, I realized that this message was more important about understanding Bernice than words on the line.

Bernice was born and grew up as the youngest in a family of four girls, in a rural farming community west of the city of Edmonton in the province of Alberta. Her father was the Reeve of the county and also served the community as a school trustee. Her mother was a homemaker who was actively involved with her church. Bernice attended the local elementary, junior high, and senior high schools and stated that her schooling was uneventful except for the time around the transition from elementary to junior high school:

> I believe I was seen as a gifted student in elementary school. In Grade Six I was accelerated to Grade Seven. However, after a short period in Grade Seven I was decelerated back to Grade Six. Although I do not recall being told why I was being put back in Grade Six, I am sure it was on account of my behavior.

Bernice did not distinguish herself academically in high school. However, she was involved in a number of service activities in the school such as the student council, the yearbook, and the service club. Her most memorable experiences in high school were the leadership camps that she attended in a small Alberta town with other students from throughout the province. She recalled:

> I was really active in high school. I was on students' council, I was the newspaper editor, and I attended the leadership camp for two years. The leadership camp was so good for me for a couple of reasons. I made a really good friend there whom I still see, and the camp reinforced my values and beliefs. It made me recognize that it was all right to be "off center."

She also spoke about feeling out of place in her small community: 'I couldn't wait to finish school and to get away from small-town Alberta. I felt that the place lacked culture. I was dying to go to the big city."

Following graduation from high school, Bernice moved to Edmonton and started working. Her first job was as a teacher's aide at the Evelyn Unger School, a private school for students with learning disabilities and communication disorders. She was living with two young women, and by her own admission, she worked hard and played hard. She began working as a street worker with the Boyle Street Co-operative, a social service agency in the city center. She recalled that the provincial government was handing out a great deal of money at the time for special projects, and she was involved with a project working with "street youth, kids on the street and homeless kids."

Two years later the Oliver Social Action Committee, which provided social advocacy for young people living in the high-rise apartments in the Oliver community, employed her. A short while later she decided to attend Grant McEwan College and enrolled in the Communication Arts program. While doing this, she continued her community involvement and volunteered extensively in the community. It was then that she decided that she wanted to become a teacher. She enrolled at the University of Alberta in the Faculty of Education and majored in special education.

Bernice's first job as a teacher was at an elementary-junior high school in the city center where she was assigned to teach a Division 1 Adaptation class. A few years later she was assigned to teach a differentiated class in junior high and also had some time to provide counseling in the school. She was then selected to participate in the Teacher Effectiveness program being offered in the school district. Following completion of the

program, she was invited to be a consultant with the program when it was expanded to all schools in the school district.

Bernice described the time that she spent consulting with the Effective Teaching program as a "wonderful phase" in her teaching career, because it was a period during which she learned a lot from her colleagues. After two years with the project, she left the Effective Teaching program to begin consulting with schools in programming for student differences and spent quite a bit of time assisting schools with the Behavior Disorders program. The following year she became involved in a beginning-teacher project in the district with responsibility for evaluating beginning teachers. While she worked on this project, she also did some work with the personnel department recruiting new teachers.

Bernice then went on a sabbatical leave, during which time she enrolled at the University of Alberta in Master of Education program. Upon completion of the program, she returned to the school district and was assigned to the principalship of two small schools in the city center. Over the course of her five-year tenure, one of the schools was closed due to lack of enrolment, and the other flourished.

Bernice had developed an interest in Wildwood School through her work at the university, and she believed that she could make a difference for the students and the parents of a school similar to Wildwood. In May 1995 when the principalship of Wildwood was advertised in the district, Bernice applied for the principalship and was successful in getting the position. Bernice recalled "several colleagues calling her when the appointment was made public to find out what she had done to deserve the assignment to the school." These were not calls of congratulations, but calls of condolence.

Bernice and Family

Family is very important to Bernice, and she spends a lot of time with family members. They have provided support for Bernice in all of her work. She has even managed to get them to do volunteer work in her school.

Bernice's husband is a teacher in a high school in the same school district. She said that she does not get him too involved with her school because he has his own work to do. However, he too is a strong support for her. It is this value for family that is reflected strongly in her work in the school.

Work Management and Self-Management

Almost everyone spoke of the amount of time that Bernice gives to her work. Although she does not arrive at school very early, she stays late. One teacher described her as "a very hardworking person" and then suggested, "I don't know how she does it."

Bernice admitted to managing her work in such a way that while she is in school she spends as much time as she can with students and staff. This means that she has to spend a considerable amount of time after the school day catching up on "paperwork and the other things that come across the principal's desk." She often works at home in the evening.

There are no clear boundaries between her work life and home life, and Bernice readily admits to being compulsive about her work in the service of children:

> I never feel like we've done enough. Intellectually, I can say here's what we have done for kids academically, emotionally, socially. Here's some attempt of what we've tried to do to help families. But I still feel that we've not taken it far enough. I could do this job twenty-eight hours a day or ten hours a day, and I would feel that I had not done enough. It's become a calling; it has become addictive. I know I have to work on this addiction.

She is working on achieving a balance in her life, and for the first time this year she took some steps to achieve this goal: "This spring break I took care of myself. I hid for four days, and I did nothing with the school or the district. It was a time for 'brain cleansing.'"

Although Bernice delegates many tasks, there are some tasks that she believes require her time and attention. She feels that she needs to be the person who advocates for her school and makes contact with people in the community to enlist their support for the students. She is the primary fundraiser and contact with community and business agencies.

Bernice has presented to staffs in other school districts, and although she is adept at doing this, she is finding that she needs to refocus and engage in only the high leverage activities:

> I'm used to doing presentations to other school districts. I go out and talk about success for each child in school, expectations, discipline, working with parents. I go to so many of these, that I now limit myself to speaking to groups that have over fifty participants.

Professional and Community Involvement

Bernice chooses to limit her participation in formal professional organizations and prefers to nurture her connections to other educators through one-on-one contacts. When I asked her for the rationale behind this decision, she explained that she is so submersed in education that she finds it necessary to be involved in other activities to achieve some balance in her life. She does subscribe to a variety of educational magazines and attends educational conferences on a regular basis.

She has been an adjunct professor at the University of Alberta for the past three years and has taught a course on leadership issues for the past two years.

Bernice is actively involved as a volunteer in the community and is currently the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Big Sisters/Big Brothers organization. This organization provides mentoring by its members to young people throughout the city and surrounding communities.

Bernice gets frequent requests to speak at conferences, to educators in other school districts, and to service clubs. She is an advocate for her school and for public

education, and she knows that the connections that she makes in the community can only help to strengthen the public's image of education.

Future Plans

Over the past year Bernice has been the spokesperson for a special project in her school district related to rethinking programming for students in the city center. The project is designed to look at ways of improving educational opportunities for students in eight city-center schools at the elementary and junior high levels. Her board has approved the closure of two elementary schools and two junior high school programs and given principals the green light to consolidate some programs and expand others. The goal of the project is to achieve enhanced educational opportunities for the 1,500 students in the eight city-center communities.

June 2001 will see Bernice leaving Wildwood for another assignment in the school district. The staff at Wildwood has anticipated that they will lose her. However, they are comforted by the fact that she has made a commitment to remain connected to the school through the work in her new assignment.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to understand the actions of an elementary school principal and to explore how those actions linked to the creating of enhanced educational opportunities for students in the school. I wanted to understand the foci for her leadership and how she chose activities in which to engage herself. I also wanted to know the dilemmas that she faced in providing leadership in quest for fairness in her school. What I discovered was that what had appeared simple but complex was carefully thought out and implemented. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Bernice Wonder are what make Wildwood School a place where all students can have full learning opportunities. She has created a place of magic for students, staff, parents, and community members.

A Place of Magic for Students

Wildwood School is a place where each child, regardless of his or her appearance, language, culture, values, economic status, or family background, is cared for and loved. Each child is viewed as having strengths, not deficits, and programs and practices have been adopted to help each student achieve his or her true potential. Parents or guardians and the community have been brought together into a partnership with the school to remove the barriers to learning for all students, and every achievement, be it big or small, is acknowledged and celebrated.

There is a school-wide ethos of high expectations at Wildwood. The emphasis on academics, clear expectations for learning and behavior, high levels of student participation, and the availability of quality resources to support learning are the prevailing conditions. In addition to this, there is an ethos of caring and support in the

school. The mission statement for the school, developed by the staff, parents, and community members, confirms this ideal.

The school has moved to incorporate an all-school focus on literacy and has implemented the Balanced Literacy program (Brailsford, in press) beginning in kindergarten, demonstrating a collective vision for academic development in the school. This program is similar to the reading program in Success for All (Slavin, 1988) and the Accelerated Schools Project (Levin, 1988). The program is designed to address the key areas of literacy development and facilitates addressing a variety of student abilities in the classroom. The resource materials to support the program are rich and varied, and the instructional strategies are focused on moving students from guided to independent learning and on developing high-level thinking skills as well as basic skills. As part of this initiative, students experiencing difficulty with reading in Grade 1 are provided with support in the form of one-on-one tutoring to help them with reading through the Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1993).

Bernice recalled how the Balanced Literacy program got started in Wildwood: "It was the staff came to me with the idea of bringing in the program." Although the school did not have the money for the program, Bernice saw the value of their idea and set about finding the money so that the staff could participate in the in-servicing and also purchase the learning resources that were required for the program. The school received the money from an anonymous donor in the community. This focus on literacy is embedded in most of the activities in the school.

De-tracking students, abolishing pullout programs, and moving to organize the school in heterogeneous groupings have furthered the emphasis on academics. When Bernice arrived at Wildwood five years ago, there were three Adaptation classes—congregated groupings of students who were not experiencing success in the regular program. The reasons for the students' lack of success varied, and Bernice was quick to recognize that this arrangement would almost guarantee lack of success for the students

in them. She also believed that the students lacked good role models in these groupings. Her action is supported by the research on the positive academic and social outcomes as a result of heterogeneous, cooperative learning groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Slavin, 1996).

Bernice has worked with the staff to provide a caring and supportive environment for learning at Wildwood. I observed teachers and other staff mustering the compassion to look beyond the hostility in some of the students to the insecurities that lie underneath. Staff "reached beyond the resistance" (Kohl, 1994, p. 156) and connected with young people's souls. They accepted students unconditionally, regardless of their idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence. I witnessed a student going to Bernice's office to share what he had achieved. Tony was a chubby, unkempt youngster, and he had gone to tell Bernice that he was now reading at the Grade 6 level. Her eyes filled with tears and she made the comment, "I knew you could do it, and look at what you've done; you've made a grown woman cry. From this day on I am going to call you Tony, the man who made a grown woman cry." Tony had a beaming smile on his face, and I could swear that he stood taller at that moment. Noddings (1988) highlighted the importance of caring in a school:

> My guess is that when schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends that we now pursue so painfully and artificially will be achieved somewhat naturally. . . . It is obvious that children work harder and do things—even odd things like adding fractions—for people they love and trust. (p. 425)

I witnessed many such positive and caring interactions with students not only with Bernice, but also with other members of staff.

Bernice and the staff at Wildwood have high expectations for the students and their learning and behavior. Bernard (1995) conveyed the value of high expectations in schools: "Schools that establish high expectations for all students—and provide the

support necessary to achieve those expectations—have high rates of academic success" (p. 85).

Bernice and the staff convey positive and high expectations to all students in several ways. One of the most obvious and powerful is the personal relationships that have been nurtured between students and school staff and the positive messages that the students receive from them. I often heard Bernice and other staff members make comments to students such as, "This work is important," "I know you can do it," and "I won't give up on you." Students who were succeeding against all odds talked about being respected and having their strengths and abilities recognized. As one student said, "Ms. Wonder will help you to be the best."

Wildwood School also communicates high expectations in the way that the staff have structured and organized learning. Although the province mandates the curriculum, the school has enriched and varied the curriculum by ensuring a strong co-curricular and extra-curricular program. Students have the opportunity to be successful not just in academics, but also in art, music, sports, and community service, and in helping with their peers. The school recommended one of their students for the Great Kids Award sponsored by the provincial government's Social Services department. The student, Mandy, was one of the finalists in the province and was recognized for "her contribution to family, community and especially her involvement in the many activities at Wildwood School." In their letter of nomination for the award, Bernice and Mandy's teacher described the student as an excellent role model and praised her for her participation in the breakfast club and the first aid patrol.

Expectations for behavior are based on respect and citizenship. School rules are few, and students are guided to make good choices in a caring and supportive environment. This has resulted in a safe learning environment, and as one teacher commented, "We just don't have the behavior problems that our colleagues think should

exist in an inner city school." Each student gives back to the community by doing a service project.

The school has also tried to infuse multicultural content throughout the curriculum in an attempt to honor students' home cultures. Zeichner (1995) emphasized the importance of cultural congruence for student achievement:

> In order for teachers to implement the principle of cultural congruence, they must have knowledge and respect for the various cultural traditions and languages of students in their classrooms. Anything less ensures that many ethnic and language minority students will continue to fall short of meeting high academic standards. (p. 49)

At Wildwood, Bernice encourages the staff to be sensitive to the many cultures represented in the school. About 65% of the school population is Aboriginal, and many of the staff have attended workshops on the cultures of the First Nations groups. Parents have also been used as a resource for students and staff to learn about Aboriginal cultures. In relation to the curriculum, the inclusion of different cultural perspectives has been achieved mainly through the inclusion of children's literature from the various cultures. Bernice encourages all students to study their own cultures and their primary language, but she does not go beyond that in promoting different cultures. Bernice does not support multicultural days or other similar events, because she wishes to guard against intensifying cultural stereotypes. The only exception has been the Aboriginal night, which was organized because several parents, including some Aboriginal parents, had requested it.

The assessment strategies used also convey high expectations to the students. At Wildwood I observed that there was very little use of standardized tests to assess learning. According to Gardner (1993), standardized tests assess only one or two types of intelligences, usually linguistic and logical mathematical. Instead, the students were provided with opportunities to demonstrate their learning through reflection, critical inquiry, and problem solving. These assessments validated the children's different

intelligences, strengths, and learning styles. The use of alternate forms of assessment is a standard item for discussion between Bernice and each teacher during their one-on-one meetings.

A final area where high expectations play a role is in motivating students and instilling in them a responsibility for learning. Although Bernice and the staff work to develop intrinsic motivation by engaging the students in a variety of rich and experiential curricula that connect to their interests, strengths, and real-world activities, Bernice continues to use rewards to encourage students. Students who receive a positive referral for schoolwork or behavior get a token of recognition. Students who receive a positive referral for academic work get a book, which ties into the school focus on literacy development. Kohn (1993) argued that extrinsic rewards punish youth. Bernice stated that she has not seen any evidence of this at Wildwood.

Students are given opportunities to participate actively in decision making in the daily lives of their classrooms, and in all classrooms the students have created the "classroom constitution" (Saranson, 1990) to guide classroom interaction. Bernice encourages the teachers to employ approaches such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, buddy classes, and community service. Although I was not researching the instruction in the school, I did have many opportunities to be in the classrooms. In all of them, without exception, I observed students involved in collaborative learning, working either in pairs or in groups. Several classes in the school have also become buddy classes to another class in the school. The staff feels that the use of these strategies has built responsibility and ownership for learning. Pines (1984) found that schools that gave students a lot of responsibility had low levels of dropouts and delinquency. Student decision making relative to the whole school is one thing that Bernice identified on which she and the staff needed to work.

Through high expectations, accompanied by caring and support, students at Wildwood School are developing resiliency. Garmezy (1991) and Wang (1992) defined

resilience as "vulnerabilities or protective mechanisms that modify the individual's response to risk situations and operate at turning points during his or her life." Students at Wildwood are viewed for their strengths and not their deficits, and they have been provided with nurturing and protection. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith (1987) identified the four major processes that foster resilience as (a) reducing negative outcomes by altering the risk or the child's exposure to risk, (b) reducing negative chain reaction following risk exposure, (c) establishing and maintaining self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) opening up opportunities. The Breakfast Club, the hot lunch program, the family therapist, and the school nurse are some of the school initiatives to reduce risk for students. Further, children are provided with a mentor to support them in understanding that they are valued and that they are not responsible for the inconsistency, abuse, and neglect that may be present in their lives.

Disruptive behavior, chronic absenteeism, or lack of academic progress may be signs of a student's exposure to risk (Winfield, 2001). At Wildwood when any one of these signs becomes evident in a student, the school takes a coordinated approach to reducing the negative chain reaction that usually follows exposure to risk. The classroom teacher, the family therapist, the school nurse, and the principal, working together as a team, evaluate the student's needs and put together a plan to support and assist the student. The school nurse talked about one instance in which she was able to assist a student:

> Andrea was referred because she was experiencing trouble with reading in spite of participating in the Reading Recovery program. I managed to get her an appointment with an eye specialist, who determined that she had major difficulties with her vision and that she needed glasses. Through our contacts with an optical dispensing business in town, we were able to get her a free pair of glasses. I believe Andrea is improving with her schoolwork now that she can see.

Bernice also works with other educational and social agencies so that the school can operate as a protective factor in the lives of the students. A worker from Children

Services is in the school weekly and is a strong support not only for Bernice, but also for the students who are part of his caseload. Bernice talked about his involvement:

> Our child welfare worker is at the school every Thursday morning. I have asked him to interpret his role a bit differently. What I want from Paul is if a new family moves in, I want to be able to phone Paul and get some information. In this way, we can work together to meet the student's needs. Not all the workers are willing to do this. It depends on the individual.

Agencies such as the United Way, Big Sisters/Big Brothers, Center for Family Literacy, Success by Six, and the Family Center play a very big part in the school and provide a full range of services from the hot lunch program to after-school care.

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are developmental processes that are learned in positive interactions with peers or adults and in successfully accomplishing a task, be it academic, musical, artistic, or athletic. Bernice and the staff help the students to develop self-esteem by giving them small tasks that they can accomplish successfully. Academic learning tasks give students an opportunity to use multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and students are given permission to demonstrate their learning in various ways. Students of all ages are encouraged to participate in learning that is nonacademic. Students help in the lunchroom, in the office, with the custodial staff, in the library, with the C team, with the first-aid patrol, and with many different activities in the school. All of these activities require them to act independently in some way; helping the students to develop self-efficacy. Winfield (2001) concluded that self-efficacy develops when students learn that they have some control over certain things in their environment and that they are not helpless. In some classes, students set goals for themselves and self-monitor their progress. This practice is not standard in the school and is one that Bernice would like to see used in all classrooms.

Bernice and the staff at Wildwood work hard to provide students with opportunities to succeed. They have broadened the types of activities and learning strategies that are available to students. Bernice supports teachers to use hands-on

learning to allow those students who do not learn well abstractly to gain and demonstrate new knowledge. Art and music activities have been integrated into learning units to allow students who are expressive to show other students that they can do some activities well. Students are provided with a relevant and demanding curriculum, and instruction that builds on their strengths and helps them to be problem solvers. Students are guided to make wise choices. Bernice will often ask a student " Did you make a good choice?" "What can you differently next time? and "How can you solve the problem?" whether it be with math or with behavior.

Working with community agencies has extended learning time for students. One example is the Cool Schools program offered by Continuing Education Services in the school district. This program is designed to help students with their academic work. Bernice and the staff had identified the needs of the students and determined that the generic program that was being offered did not meet the needs of the students at Wildwood. Bernice contacted the director of the program and requested that they customize a program for the students, which they did. Several students attended the program and have benefited from it.

There are a number of ways in which the school recognizes students and celebrates milestones in the students' achievements and performance in the academic, cultural, and artistic areas, along with sports and grades. Positive referrals, certificates of recognition, Club Norwood, and the Golden Hour Clock award are some of the formalized ways in which students are recognized. However, staff and other adults in the school use gestures such as a pat on the shoulder, a hug, and encouraging words more widely; and Bernice is the best model of these practices in the school.

All students are encouraged to participate actively in all aspects of the school program regardless of their sex or their ability. Boys and girls play sports, participate in all clubs, are on the cheerleading team, help out in the lunchroom, or do office-helper duty. At a hockey game I saw a physically small student playing in the goal and an

overweight boy playing his heart out as forward, and the girls participated as actively as the boys. Their classmates and their teachers cheered the students on.

The principal emphasizes the importance of every student being treated as a unique and valuable member of the school family, and the school has become a safe and caring environment in which they can learn and play. One student commented: "Next year, I am going to junior high. I hope I can find a school that is like this school. I think this is the best school in the city."

One can only hope that every student who passes through the school experiences some of the magic and leaves the school feeling good about himself or herself as a human being and with an optimism for the future.

A Place of Magic for Staff

Wildwood School is a place where teachers, administrators, support staff, and custodians have come together with a collective vision for their work. Each person's strengths are recognized and are utilized to help students to achieve success, and individual contributions to school life are valued, recognized, and celebrated. Everyone is supported to continue learning and growing in the service of children. The warm and supporting environment allows the staff to take risks and sends the message that the work they do is important and that each one of them can have a lasting impact in the life of at least one child. The staff is the anchor for the Wildwood family.

Bernice has the same high expectations for the staff that she has for the students, and she provides them with caring and support, as she does the students. She has created an environment in which teachers are valued as professionals and staff have a common purpose and a collective vision for their work with children. Dufour and Eaker (1996) have pointed out the importance of a collective vision in the establishment of a learning organization (p. 63). At Wildwood "we don't make excuses, we make improvements" was a statement that I heard often at staff meetings.

Bernice views the teachers as professionals and treats them as such. She "influences their actions by expecting the best from them" (Blasé & Kirby, 1992, p. 34). She expects them to engage in ongoing professional development, and she expects them to be reflective practitioners. She supports professional development by providing staff with information and by making funds available for them to attend in-service sessions, workshops, and conferences. One staff member commented, "She has never said no to professional development." Teachers have had the opportunity to attend national or international conferences on reading, literacy, and research in education. One staff member has attended conferences on educating urban Aboriginal students and has become a resource for the school. Teachers are expected to share the knowledge gained at these professional development activities with all staff. The school has lengthened the instructional time on four days, allowing time on one day of the week for staff to get together to engage in ongoing professional development in the school. Every Thursday afternoon from 2:30 p.m. to about 4:00 p.m., Bernice and the staff meet to discuss items that are relevant to programming for students at Wildwood.

Bernice has built a collaborative school culture, and the ability to work collaboratively is an important criterion in the selection of new staff members. Ackerman, Donaldson, and Van Der Bogert (1996) suggested that "principals and teachers should make learning how to collaborate a fundamental goal in and of itself" (p. 135). Bernice has assigned each staff member to a "triad"—a cross-graded, cross-disciplinary group—and each triad works collaboratively to provide their input on various issues and concerns. Most recently, the triads worked to establish the instructional focus for the coming school year. Triads not only meet on the early dismissal day, but they also often meet informally to discuss issues that may be relevant to various aspects of the school's operation. Though the triad is the formalized mechanism for staff to have input into decision making in the school, Bernice maintains

an open door to staff. Bernice finds that because she tends to stay late at the school, many staff use that time for sharing and seeking her advice and assistance.

Bernice views supervision of staff from a collegial perspective. She often meets with individual teachers to find out about what is happening in the classroom, and she shares her insights from her observations on her walkabouts in the school. These conversations can be over a cup of coffee, or they may be held in her office. Bernice will often give teachers feedback "on the fly." She uses a similar process with other staff members.

Bernice is of the opinion that the teachers know more about curriculum and instruction for their students than she does, and that is how it should be. She shared her thoughts on this:

> I am the first person to say that I know very little about early childhood education. I have some ideas and beliefs, but Amy and Jacquie know more about it. They often work together, and I will even bring in a substitute teacher if they want to observe each other's classes. I believe that I support teachers by trusting that they know what they're doing.

She "leads by standing behind" (Blasé & Kirby, 1992, p. 64).

Bernice is quick to add that she does not treat all the staff alike. She individualizes her supervision of staff due to the fact that "they're all at different levels of ability, and they have varying levels of commitment to the work here at Wildwood." Staff members who are 'in synch' with Wildwood's philosophy are provided with a high level of freedom and tremendous latitude to do their work. Bernice described being 'in synch' with the school's philosophy as "the individual does the best job teaching that he or she possibly can, and he or she is available for students." Bernice does not shy away from letting staff members know if they are not carrying their load in the school. For those who lack the commitment or the passion for working with students at Wildwood, Bernice has counseled them to move to another school in the district. She was emphatic when she shared, "There is a Wildwood way!"

Bernice provides teachers and other staff members with tremendous support and encouragement to do their jobs. She supports them with problems with students and parents, but as one teacher put it, "We only send kids and parents to see Bernice when all else fails." The staff knows that when they ask for her assistance, she will deal with the issues and she will follow through. The staff also commented on the availability of resources including technology in the school, which makes their jobs easier. The school is not lacking for resources either financially or physically.

Without exception, each staff member feels valued at Wildwood School. Each member receives numerous phone calls, letters, and comments on a job well done; and every staff member talked about "how she makes me feel special." Many of them talked about her role modeling. "She never works less than she expects anyone else to work" and "No one has ever complained that we have to work too hard, as she is doing the same thing or more" were frequent comments. Bernice uses praise and humor to keep staff morale high, and the staff are the first to admit that "she is sometimes crazy!"

One teacher described the transformation in her being as a teacher working with Bernice by referring to a children's book by Cynthia Rylant (1998):

> I don't know if you are familiar with a little book called *The Van Gogh Café*. It's a lovely story about a café in Kansas. As you go through each chapter it's almost like a short story, and you realize that it's very much a place of magic. As people pass through there the problems that they come in with are solved, and they leave as better people. Well, that's how I see Bernice. Anybody who spends time with her or comes into contact with her leaves as a better teacher and also a better person.

There is magic for teachers at Wildwood!

Magic for Parents

Wildwood School has created a place for most parents where according to the parents, once they enter they are quick to forget their negative feelings about school. The school gives them the space and time to learn how to be partners with the school and help

their children to achieve success. One's appearance, language, culture, values, economic status, or family background are not barriers to entering the partnership; and they are welcomed into the school. Parents are supported if they are experiencing difficulty, and their involvement and contributions to school life are acknowledged and celebrated.

Parents of students at Wildwood School are actively involved in their children's education, shattering the myth that parents of students in low socioeconomic areas generally do not get involved in schools. This has not happened by accident; it has happened because of a planned and concerted effort by Bernice and the staff. The school's "explicit strategic intervention" (Fullan, 1997a) for parent involvement has many components. The intervention plan includes communication, involvement, and evaluation by parents in the education of their children.

Parents receive regular communication from the school not only about their children, but also about education and the role that they can play. At the beginning of the year each parent receives a handbook from the school. The cover of the school's parent handbook conveys a clear message on how parents can be partners with the school in the education of their children:

> **P**articipate in school activities by visiting your child's classroom and lending a helping hand.
> **A**dmire and love your child. Build on strengths and help improve weaknesses.
> **R**ead with your child—street signs, billboards, grocery lists, maps, books, magazines, cartoons, etc. . . . Set a goal of spending as much time reading together as watching television.
> **E**ncourage hobbies and interests such as sports, music, collections, pets, pen pals, or handicrafts. Suggest friendships with children with similar interests.
> **N**ote your child's progress with verbal praise and a pat on the back. Be positive. Never compare progress with that of another child.
> **T**alk about school, interests, friends, places you go together, and things you do as a family. Encourage your child to ask questions. Answer questions patiently.
> **S**upport your child. Stress the need to learn to read for enjoyment.

In addition to this message, every school newsletter and every classroom newsletter contains information about something that parents can do to help their children.

One of the expectations for the teachers is that they will communicate on a regular basis with the parents or guardians of the children in their classroom. Parent-student-teacher conferences are held twice a year, and Bernice and the staff indicated that they have over 95% attendance at these conferences. In addition to these formal conferences, parents are encouraged to meet with the teacher whenever they feel it is necessary. Teachers make phone calls to the parents to make positive referrals as well as when they have a concern about a student's progress in school.

The message that the parents are consistently given by the school is, "Together we can make a difference for your children." The school has structured some formalized activities for parents to be involved in the school. Bernice believes that spending time together is important for every family. To facilitate this time together, the school has eight family nights planned each year. Students may attend only if accompanied by one or more adults in the family, and activities include such things as a breakfast, a feast and a read-in, a craft night, a potluck supper, and a games evening. The staff has been pleasantly surprised with the good turnout at these events. In addition, there are four additional adult evenings planned to inform parents about curriculum, study skills, and other matters related to parents working with children. Babysitting is provided. Here again, the turnout has been impressive. Parents are also invited to the monthly student assemblies, and many do come.

Parents are welcomed into the school at all times, and some volunteer in their children's classrooms. Bernice can often be found talking to parents as they drop off or pick up their children at the school. She takes every opportunity to ask them about how they are supporting their child's learning, and she informs them of the supports that are available. She listens to the suggestions that they have to improve life for students, and she acts on many suggestions. She also recognizes parent involvement by highlighting one parent as the volunteer of the month. This individual receives a bouquet of flowers from the school, the individual's name is posted on the sign in front of the school, and the

individual is highlighted in the school newsletter. All volunteers are recognized in the school newsletters.

The school offers support to parents through the family therapist, the home support workers, and the school nurse. The family therapist is available to counsel parents related to problems that they might be having with their children. The home care workers are available to assists parents and students to make changes in their lives, and the school nurse is there to assist with connecting them with medical services. The parents use all of these services extensively. Bernice's philosophy is that the parents can get stronger by "getting a hand up rather than a hand out!"

Sadly, Bernice shared that she saw firsthand the difficulties that she believes are prevalent in many families at Wildwood. Bernice had accompanied a student to an awards ceremony to celebrate the accomplishments of young people in Alberta, one of them being a student at Wildwood School. She had invited the student's family to accompany her to the awards ceremony. She recounted what took place:

> We were seated with other children and their families, and it soon became apparent that our family was having difficulty relating to one another and the situation. The parents could not see the value in being present at the ceremony. The father did not want to participate in many of the activities that had been planned for the children, such as a visit to the zoo, so our student lost out. He did not appear to be proud of his daughter's accomplishments and he complained incessantly. I felt sorry for our student.

The lack of parenting skills has made Bernice look for ways to support families further, and she is exploring setting up mentorship opportunities for families much like the in-school mentorship program for students.

For parents who do get involved, and there are many, the experiences have been satisfying. I was invited to join Bernice and the eight key communicators for the school at a dinner meeting one evening. The intent of the meeting was to get input from this group of parents on changes that they would like to see take place in relation to the programming offered by the school. Many of these individuals recalled having been

unsuccessful in school and felt that Wildwood School is changing schooling, allowing them to envision success for their children. All of them expressed how pleased they were with their involvement in the school, and they expressed their feelings about being welcomed to participate. One shared that she had learned to read after getting involved with her child in the home reading program! On the district survey, parents have expressed high levels of satisfaction with their input and involvement with the school, the communication with the school, and the school in general.

The magic continues!

A Place of Magic for Community Members

The future of our society lies with its young people, and Wildwood School provides a place where members of the community can make a significant contribution to their success. Many community members have accepted this calling and have become part of the life at Wildwood through their voluntary involvement with school. They bring joy and excitement to learning for many, and they see their involvement making a difference. Their contributions are valued, acknowledged, and celebrated.

At Wildwood School several nonprofit agencies play a significant role as partners in the education of children. The United Way either directly or indirectly provides the funds for many of the programs and services that are available to the students and their families.

The United Way through its Partners for Kids program operates the mentorship program at the school. The in-school mentoring program plays an important role in bringing the community into the school, and what is unique about this program is that the agency funds and runs the program in its entirety. A second feature of its uniqueness is that it is tied closely to the literacy focus in the school. Many mentoring programs place an emphasis on social and recreational interactions to develop the child's self-esteem,

confidence, and positive attitudes towards school (Brown, 1996; Flaxman & Ascher, 1992).

One staff member is attached to the program at the school. This individual functions as the 'partnership' coordinator and is instrumental in the ongoing development, refinement, and implementation of the program. This staff member, who has a background in education, works closely with the teachers to match mentors with students.

Over 150 community members—university and college students, police officers, military personnel, teachers and administrators on leave from their positions, members of the business communities, friends and relatives of staff, and retirees—spend a minimum of 30 minutes each week mentoring students from preschool to Grade 6. Mentors are screened to ensure the safety of the students and are trained by the Big Sisters/Big Brothers organization.

Bernice has a strong conviction, backed by research (Flaxman & Ascher, 1992; Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Sopris West, 1993), that mentoring can have a significant impact on the success of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in school. One mentor shared the impact that that mentoring is having on the student:

> Tracy and I meet weekly. Last week she gave me a book that she had put together for me with some of her writing, artwork, and her reflections on the time that we have had together. On the cover, she had drawn a picture of herself on the path to her future, with me standing at her side. This path led to university and beyond. What fascinated me was the depiction that there is a bright future, and I would be there to support her all the way down this path.

This mentor has made a commitment well beyond what is expected of mentors in schools. He has pledged to financially support the student if she chooses to attend university.

The children, their parents, and the staff value mentors. Several staff commented, "The students get so much from the time spent with mentors," "Learning isn't just about curriculum; they [the students] can learn as much or more from their mentors as they could have in that half an hour in the class," "I see how keen and excited and interested and motivated my kids are when they go with the mentor," and "The kids are lucky to have an adult who cares so much about them."

A family services agency which receives its funding from the United Way has placed a family therapist in Wildwood School, half time. This individual provides support to the staff and counseling to students and parents, and helps to connect families to other services in the city. This agency also provides the school with two parent support workers. These workers are available to assist parents make significant changes so that their lives and the lives of their children can be improved. They are available to parents on a seven-days-a-week, twenty-four-hours-a-day basis. Both Bernice and the staff feel that this service is helping many parents make significant changes in their lives and is also helping the children in these families to be successful in school.

The Wildwood Child and Resource Center, which is also funded by the United Way, provides out-of-school programs for the students and operates Planet Wildwood, an after-school club for children that is attended by many of the students at Wildwood School.

A family literacy center offers literacy training workshops for parents and runs the BOOKS program with the students at Wildwood. The BOOKS program trains older students to read to younger siblings at home. Success by Six is another program that provides support to the school with a literacy focus. Several other nonprofit agencies have involvement with the school and provide support for both the curricular and sports programs in the school.

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Some students have had the experience of watching a game from a private box. This company also provides each student with a pair of pyjamas for the school's Pyjama Day.

An energy pipeline company funds a breakfast program for one of the classes. A construction company constructed the Sunshine Garden for the students. A local personnel agency gave the school a gift of 15 new computers as well as a large sum of money. This company also gives its staff time to mentor in the school. A local stationery store provides the school with cards and writing paper. Several businesses provide money for books and special events.

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Bernice has developed a close working relationship with several public service agencies and has been tenacious in bringing the services into an integrated service delivery model at the school. Children's Services of the province, the city's Child Welfare service, the Capital Health Region Services, and the Police Service are present in the school and play a significant role in supporting students and their families. The preschool program was initiated with partial funding from the office of the minister of Children's Services.

Several philanthropic groups support the school. The math lab, the full-day kindergarten program, the preschool program, and the after-school music program are some of the school initiatives that have resulted with the funding from this source.

The concept of school as a central institution in a network of people, agencies, and institutions in the broader school community (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990) has been well developed at Wildwood School. Bernice has been the key player in this, and she shared the dilemmas that she faces in this work: "I can justify many of the things that we have done to help the students and their families. I still feel that we've not taken it far enough." She has not found the answer to this dilemma.

The other dilemma is related to her advocacy for children in her school. She has found that the community tends to provide support only when she paints a dismal picture. Therefore, when she goes out to advocate for Wildwood students and their families, she talks about the students and their less-than-ideal circumstances. She stated, "Unfortunately, poor pays." She has come to terms with this approach to getting the community to support the school because in the end it is the children who gain.

I sense several dilemmas that were not raised by Bernice. There is the dilemma of whether the changes at Wildwood can be sustained when Bernice leaves the school. Bernice's personality, her leadership style and skills, and her ability to develop positive relationships with staff, parents and community members have allowed her to secure the necessary human and fiscal resources to enhance educational opportunities for students at Wildwood School. An individual replacing Bernice may not have a similar style, set of skills or ability to maintain the strong relationships with staff, parents and community members to sustain the changes that Bernice has brought to the school. In addition, the individual may not understand and demonstrate school leadership in the same way as Bernice does. Bernice's leadership can best be viewed as heroic. Heroic leadership is viewed as a style of leadership that is not necessarily required or desirable for all principals.

Another dilemma is related to the support that Wildwood School receives from the community in terms of funding and gifts in kind. The under-funding of education in the province and the lack of authority for school boards to raise supplementary funding, has created a situation where the system is starved of resources. School principals are being forced to become entrepreneurial in seeking funding that is external to the school system in order to enhance educational opportunity in their schools. Bernice has assumed the responsibility to solicit social service organizations, businesses and individuals in the community for funds for her school and much of her time and effort is spent on this. The United Way is by far the most significant partner. The United Way funds several initiatives that have enhanced educational opportunities for children in the school. If the priorities of the United Way were to change, the programs at the school would be severely impacted and the children will be the losers. It is also unrealistic to continue to expect that the businesses and individuals will continue to provide additional money to support public education when they are already paying for it with their taxes.

The dilemma of who should have responsibility for ensuring that schools are funded to appropriate levels is highlighted by Bernice's actions. School principals are being forced to deal with systemic issues individually in their schools. School boards are made up of elected trustees whose job it is to secure funding for education and to distribute fiscal resources in an equitable way to schools in their districts. School boards are also responsible for ensuring that there is enhanced educational opportunity for all students in the district's schools. However, it appears that increasingly school principals are being encouraged and recognized for assuming this role. What then is the role of the school board in relation to the funding of education and what is their role in ensuring that there is equity in funding for enhanced educational opportunity for all students the schools in their district?

Returning to the Question

The purpose of this study was to understand what a principal who is reputed to be effective in dealing with enhanced educational opportunity issues in an urban elementary school does, how that principal chooses the actions in which to engage, and how those actions relate to ensuring the enhancement of educational opportunity in the school.

I increased my understanding of inner-city schools. I learned that Wildwood School, though small in size, is complex in nature. The school deals with a wide range of issues, many of which are not related to learning specifically. On a daily basis the school deals with social, cultural, medical, psychological, and legal issues.

The instructional experiences to which students are exposed and in which they become involved determine the success or failure of their schooling. This is critical for students who have been placed at risk by traditional approaches to schooling. Bernice has ensured that all students are provided with an accelerated rather than a slowed-down instructional program. Teachers are required to create learning environments that are characterized by high expectations, a challenging and interdisciplinary curriculum focusing on student engagement, critical thinking, concepts applied to real-world and personal experiences, and concrete problem solving.

Bernice has concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and the quality of learning in the school. She has established the framework for teaching and learning and provided the necessary support for teachers to develop their roles within the framework. She has provided instructional leadership without active involvement in the classroom or coaching of teachers, set ongoing professional development as a requirement for teachers, and supported them in their efforts to learn and grow. She has ensured that all staff members have the competencies to address the diverse needs of the students academically, behaviorally, and socially. Staff do not display a 'blame the victim" attitude; they are strong advocates for their students.

In order to be responsive to more than students' educational needs, staff must have access to support services and this was demonstrated clearly at Wildwood School. Bernice has created a network of people, agencies, and institutions in the broader community to support the work of teachers and the school. There is a community-wide ethic that supports educational attainment as a value to be acknowledged, rewarded, and reinforced (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990).

Adequate human and material resources are essential for ensuring the enhancement of educational opportunity. Many things have been achieved at Wildwood with material and financial resources that have come from the community and are supplementary to the allocation from the school district. Bernice's connections with the community and her ability to 'cajole' people into supporting the school have been critical in the process. If the school were forced to offer programming with only the allocation from the school district, it would not have the financial capacity to secure the human and material resources that are deemed necessary to achieve enhanced educational opportunity.

I enhanced my understanding of the importance of creating community in school, and I learned that it was possible to create unity in difference (Sergiovanni, 1997; Shields, in press). The differences represented in the school community relate to class, language, socioeconomic status, level of education, gender, values, beliefs, and past position. Bernice has demonstrated that she is comfortable with and capable of negotiating, understanding, and mediating actions among an expanding list of people, groups, and points of view as staff, parents, and community members collaborate for the success of all students. In creating a sense of community at Wildwood, she has "merged lay wisdom and professional expertise" (Ackerman et al., 1996, p. 144).

I learned how important it is to attend to the personal and affective needs of students and staff, and I furthered my understanding of the value of creating strong relationships between staff and students, and staff and other staff. Through their

interactions with the students, the staff created a positive self-concept and sense of confidence for students. Bernice and the staff were focused on helping students to see themselves as learners and recognize their potential to be successful in educational environments. Students are assured that the school staff is made up of competent, caring adults in whom they can have trust.

Bernice's interactions with the staff are the model for their interaction with the students. Through her interactions with individual members of staff, she has created a positive self-esteem and confidence in each of them.

I gained a greater understanding of the importance of developing relationships in the school and beyond the school. Bernice has developed positive relationships with all of the individuals on the staff. Without exception, all of them commented on how "wonderful" it was to work with a principal like Bernice. She is open and authentic, and she has built a relationship that allows each staff member to improve. She is willing to listen and to understand, as well as being able to express ideas and feelings trustfully (Ackerman et al., 1996). It is my reading that all members of staff felt that they were valued for the work that they did to help all students be successful.

She has created similar relationships with the parents and community members. All of the parents and community members with whom I had contact expressed feeling valued by Bernice for the contributions, big and small, that they made towards helping all the students at Wildwood become successful.

I learned that in a vision of schools as mediators on behalf of students' academic and nonacademic needs, the basic roles and responsibilities have to change and move beyond traditional boundaries (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990). Bernice has been a successful change agent and has been able to create an environment at Wildwood School in which the boundaries amongst and between the agencies that are working for students are fluid and variable. The school staff provides leadership to community agencies to develop activities that support and complement the educational efforts of the school. The

community agencies have responded to the needs of the students in the school by providing a variety of out-of-school programs for students throughout the school year.

I came to understand the importance of redefining the cultural norms of the school to focus on success for all students, a success that was defined. Bernice's philosophy that every child can learn is presented as a practical, attainable reality (Slavin et al., 1996). In particular, Wildwood School is focused on every child becoming a successful reader by the end of their eighth year—pre-kindergarten to Grade 6—in school.

Bernice provides professional and personal support to the staff and in doing so has increased their sensitivity and responsiveness to students' needs and circumstances. She has assisted the staff to develop collaborative relationships as well as responsibility for the educational success and personal nurturing of their students (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990).

I learned the value of having a collective vision. Bernice has been successful in articulating the professional mission of her leadership and motivating students, staff, parents and community members to make the vision a reality. Her leadership has created a collective vision for the school. Dufour and Eaker (1998) presented the need for a collective vision: "An effective vision statement articulates a vivid picture of the organization's future that is so compelling that a school's members will be motivated to work together to make it a reality" (p. 62). She behaves in a way that others can easily trust her.

The school has become an environment where all students are treated justly, and where they learn useful knowledge and skills and become healthy individuals and responsible members of society (Ackerman et al., 1996). Justice is defined as doing what is right. Justice at Wildwood is a shared responsibility with all the other adults in the school community. Bernice has created a "democratic institution" (Ackerman et al., 1996) where students are prepared to be effective citizens with the skills of critical thinking, an ability to see another's perspectives, an understanding to be part of a political

process, and a sense of responsibility for the collective. The democratic approach has been extended to staff, parents, and community members.

I learned that school-based budgeting and school-site decision-making are enabling processes for creating the conditions for enhanced educational opportunities in a school, but that they have to be accompanied by a will and commitment by all the adults in the school setting to see change take place. Sergiovanni (1996) called this "internal commitment to change." Bernice has demonstrated a "relentlessness" (Slavin et al., 1996) in relation to success for every child. It is possible to have school-based decision making, school-based budgeting, curriculum and instruction change, family support, and all the other services and still not ensure success for children who are at risk in the school. She has coordinated all the human resources in the school around well-defined goals and is focused on never giving up until that goal is reached. I saw the result of Bernice's relentless efforts to ensure that students in an economically disadvantaged area of the city receive a high-quality education.

She has created the conditions at Wildwood School under which every child can learn. Well-validated instructional methods and materials including technology are used to ensure the success of all children. Teachers are involved in continuous, collaborative professional development to improve their abilities to meet the needs of every child. Every child's performance is assessed regularly, and if he or she is falling behind in spite of excellent instruction, he or she is provided with intensive assistance. Parents are involved in the support of their children's success in school, and solutions are found for any nonacademic problems impeding school success. Children are not assigned to special education or long-term remedial classes. Community agencies and institutions have become partners with the school in ensuring success for every student at Wildwood. I believe that the failure of even one child would be cause for alarm at Wildwood School and would cause immediate forceful intervention. Bernice has created a "full-service school" (Dryfoos, 1994).

The view of enhanced educational opportunity that has been revealed by Bernice Wonder's practice at Wildwood school is one in which distributional appropriateness and sufficiency are the major criteria for services to children. Using this notion, Bernice and all the members of the school community have endeavored to provide educational treatments that are appropriate to the condition and characteristics of the individual students and sufficient to their support and correction, if needed. She holds all students to high educational standards and communicates the belief that all students can succeed. She has created a climate of caring and has built in opportunities for meaningful participation by staff, students, and parents. She has moved the school away from practices such as pull-out programs that have been proven to put students at risk, and she has embraced programs and practices such as Balanced Literacy, Reading Recovery, heterogeneous groupings, and mentoring, which have proven themselves to assist students in being successful in school.

Bernice recognizes that although the school is committed to equity in education, the school may not be able to meet all students' needs. This has necessitated the setting of limits for programming. Students who require specialized interventions as part of their programming, such as psychiatric assistance or sign language instruction, have been referred to and placed in district programs that will meet those specialized needs. Each student is placed in a district programs with the full knowledge that he or she may return to Wildwood school when the specialized interventions are no longer necessary to ensure that he or she is successful in school.

Bernice recognizes the school's capacity in terms of resources and the requisite time to fulfill its onerous, ever-expanding mandates. She has successfully engaged the community at large, and especially those social institutions that influence the lives of students, to take a proactive role in reinforcing the school's work in educating children. Community agencies and service organizations are actively involved at Wildwood school

and provide the school with financial resources and time, which are used by the school to pursue the provision of equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Bernice recognizes that it would be difficult to provide an environment of fairness for children without an environment of fairness or teachers and parents. She has endeavored to extend her practices related to fairness for students, to staff and parents. She has provided the leadership in managing change to improve learning for all students, and she has supported the staff in continued professional development to improve teaching and learning for all students. She has worked with parents and community members to assist them in taking a meaningful role in educating students and supporting the students' personal and academic growth.

Through all of her work at Wildwood school, Bernice has ensured that no individual or group is marginalized and that all individuals and groups are valued for their contributions to the life of the Wildwood school family.

Reflections on Enhancing Educational Opportunities in a School

Through the research conducted for this study, I was able to experience the life of one elementary school principal in her work with students, staff, parents, and community members to provide enhanced educational opportunities for students at Wildwood school. Although my personal views related to equity have not been altered, many questions and issues have emerged which need to be addressed.

Wildwood School has been able to provide its students with enhanced learning opportunities in spite of the ideological, political, and financial environment in which Alberta schools must exist. I believe that in Alberta there exists an ideology that any individual can be successful if he or she works hard. This ideology has been extended to the education system, where students are given the message that if they apply themselves and work hard, they can be successful. With relation to schooling, this can hardly be true when schools are marked by inequality. Some schools are better equipped and better

staffed; some students have more access to computers, reference materials, and field trips; and some students get better marks and are treated better by staff. I question whether the kinds of inequalities that exist in schools today are justifiable. All students should have full access to knowledge and information, and it is critical that the education system take these issues into consideration in any restructuring effort.

The politics of education in Alberta have been changing dramatically in recent years. The provincial government has been increasingly active in developing and legislating major changes in many aspects of schooling, including governance, testing, curriculum, teacher evaluation, and facilities. Although there has been a move to participative democracy through school councils and local school management, those most in need of the political process to advance their interests—children, poor people, less educated individuals, recent immigrants—are still least able to mobilize themselves to take advantage of this. People are excluded through factors such as process and language. Established groups who are already part of the system dominate the policy process in education. Their familiarity with the legislation and regulations, their ability to associate a grievance with an issue of public concern, their level of education, and their connections place them in an advantaged position to participate in the political process. All of this tends to push educational policy in particular directions. As long as these conditions exist, concern with fairness in education will continue to be a non-issue in Alberta politics.

The financial climate in Alberta is healthy as we begin the 21st century (Government of Alberta, 2001). Although the funding for education has increased, the principle of unequal distribution in the service of the weakest members of society has not been a guiding principle in the distribution of the wealth. School districts and schools continue to suffer from an apparent lack of financial resources which impacts on almost every aspect of programming offered to students. Schools are being placed in the position where they have no other alternative than to raise funds on their own, as was the case at

Wildwood school, in order to meet the needs of the students. This has taken principals away from the primary role of instructional leadership in their schools. It appears that creating an environment of enhanced educational opportunity now rests on a school's ability to raise funds. From my experience as a school principal, many school boards appear to support this direction to secure additional funding for schools. In doing so, I see school boards acquiescing to the policies of the government. I believe strongly that education is a public good and thus should be fully funded by the province. To do anything less would, in my view, be morally reprehensible.

Much of what happens in the pursuit of enhancing educational opportunity at Wildwood school can be attributed to Bernice Wonder's leadership. She has many of the skills identified for school leadership, and she uses them effectively with the students, staff, and parents. In addition to possessing these skills, Bernice has a certain charisma that allows her to garner support from staff, parents, and community members in the pursuit of enhanced learning opportunities for students in Wildwood School. As Bernice prepares to take on a different assignment in her school district, I wonder whether the principal who follows her will be able to sustain the efforts of the staff, parents and community in the pursuit of enhanced educational opportunities for all students. In my opinion, every educational leader has a moral obligation to ensure that all students in all schools have equitable learning opportunities. As I reflect on the education at Wildwood School, I wonder about students in other schools where the school principal may not have the skills, the charisma, or the interest in pursuing equitable learning opportunities for all students? While Bernice exemplifies effective leadership for the enhancement of educational opportunity in her school, it is critical that we examine the implications of this leadership for broader systemic issues.

Implications

Further Research

This study has provided a picture of what one school principal does in an urban elementary school setting and how her actions relate to creating fair educational opportunities in the school. Additional descriptive studies of the work of other elementary school principals would provide a rich source of information that could expand the understanding of the leadership that is required for enhanced educational opportunity for all students.

This study was carried out in a small, urban elementary school in Alberta, Canada where the political climate, both at the provincial and local level, supports the decentralization of decision-making and the decentralization of budgeting in education. Research in large elementary schools may uncover the leadership issues and dilemmas faced by principals in those settings as they work to enhance educational opportunity for all students. Additionally, research in schools in other provinces could shed light on the leadership for the enhancement of educational opportunity in schools operating in different political climates. Also, studies of principals in rural settings could provide valuable insights into the leadership for enhanced educational opportunity in settings that encompass several communities.

Additional studies of principals in secondary schools could also provide valuable information that could expand the understanding of leadership for enhanced educational opportunity in schools.

"Unity in diversity" (Sergiovanni, 2000) emerged as an important concept in the study. Given the diversity represented in society in Alberta and Canada, schools are being challenged to bring people with differing beliefs and values together in pursuit of the best education for all children. Strategies to help principals to deal with diversity relating to students, parents, staff, and community members and organizations in a just

and democratic way, should be developed and communicated. At Wildwood School, the concept of 'unity in diversity' proved to be very important in enhancing educational opportunity for all students. Staff, parents and community members from differing backgrounds and with differing values and beliefs were able to attain unity in pursuit of this ideal. This and other concepts such as 'leadership for diversity' might be explored further in the both the elementary and secondary school setting.

The concept of fairness needs to be understood in terms of social justice and democracy in schools. Fairness in education has traditionally been viewed from the perspective of financial equity. Research related to the promotion of fairness in educational opportunities would further the principals' understanding of the concept and facilitate the enhancement of educational opportunities for all students in a school.

Educational Practice

While the principal in this study exemplifies effective leadership for the enhancement of educational opportunity for all students in a school, further research is necessary to determine the implications of this leadership for broader systemic issues.

Wildwood School can be described as a 'full-service" school where services to children have been successfully integrated. The provision of integrated services to students could be studied further. How community agencies and institutions work with schools could be explored to identify effective strategies for coordinated services and for sharing responsibility for ensuring success for each student.

All schools should explore the possibility of mentoring for each child. At Wildwood mentorship is tied to the school's focus on literacy. Mentoring has been proven to support individuals socially and emotionally and can be expanded to support students academically. Further studies on the effectiveness of mentoring programs would assist school staffs in selecting appropriate approaches to mentoring for students in their school.

Senior administrators and school trustees should review literature and research on school efforts to address issues related to fairness and enhancing learning opportunities for all students. This would facilitate a greater understanding of fairness in the field of education and would assist in formulating policy and giving direction in a school district.

This study used observation and reflective conversation as the primary data-gathering strategies. The use of this methodology provided a meaningful learning experience for both the participant and the researcher. School districts should provide formalized opportunities for principals to observe one another and engage in reflective conversations related to enhancing educational opportunities for all students. Further studies of collaboration and support amongst principals would facilitate knowledge of effective strategies for inclusion in principal training programs and also in principal professional growth opportunities.

Epilogue

Through this study I increased my understanding of the leadership that is required to create the conditions for enhanced educational opportunities for all students in an urban elementary school in Alberta. I learned that it is critical and essential that leaders make visible the things taken for granted, and I learned that commitment to an ideal is an essential leadership trait for fairness in education. My understandings and learnings of the leadership of Bernice Wonder as she pursues the enhancement of educational opportunity for all students at Wildwood school will serve me well when I return to my assignment as a principal of an elementary school.

> If the needs of students who are at risk are to be adequately (and equitably) served, schools must find ways to adapt to the full range of characteristics that place students at risk. Without such adaptation, the values implicit in our conceptions of social justice and equity are not served. (Yowell, 1999, p. 34)

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Appendix I – Interview questions

INITIAL INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about yourself-your family background, your schooling experiences, your educational background, your interests, etc.
2. Please share with me your training and experience related to your position as a) a teacher and b) a principal.
3. How did you come to be the principal of a school?

SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEWS

1. Tell me about your school -the students, the staff, the parents, the community.
2. What programs have you initiated in your school?
3. How do you work with teachers to specify the educational needs of student? What is your philosophy for education?
4. How do you work with staff to facilitate positive physical and mental health with your students?
5. How do you encourage students to take responsibility for their role in initiating and sustaining effective teaching and learning transactions?
6. What is the range of instructional materials in your school? How are the instructional materials managed?
7. Describe the appropriateness and sufficiency of the human and material resources available in your school.
8. How have you organized your school? What are the philosophical underpinnings for the organization?
9. How do you provide support for the staff and their work?
10. How do you determine the nature of professional development in your school? To what extent do you involve staff in determining individual professional development? professional development for all staff?
11. How do you facilitate and maintain high levels of competency with all staff?

12. How do you nurture teacher-student relationships in the school? student-student relationships?

13. How would you describe the learning disposition of your students? What do you do in the school to influence this disposition in a positive direction?

14. How do you engage parents in the educational process? What do you do for students whose parents are unwilling or unable to participate?

15. How do you work to address the affective development of students? In your view, what is the relationship of cognitive development and affective development for your students?

16. What are the challenges that you as a principal face in providing leadership to meet the individual needs of your students?

17. Please share your thoughts on school-based budgeting and school-based decision making. In what way are they enabling processes? In what ways are they disabling?